A Chinese Perspective on Distributed Leadership at the Departmental Level in a Chinese University

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

University of Warwick
Centre for Education Studies
August 2018

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Abbreviations

CE Chemical-Engineering

EM Economic Management

ESHA European School Head Association

ESI Essential Science Indicators

ETUCE European Trade Union Committee for Education

FL Foreign Languages

MP Maths and Physics

MoE Ministry of Education

NCSL National College of School Leadership

NBSC National Bureau of Statistics of China

RATL Raising Achievement Transforming Learning Project

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Robert Smith and Ian Abbott for kindly being my supervisors and enabling this study to take place. I want to particularly thank Dr Robert Smith, who encouraged and guided me both academically and personally from the beginning to the end of my Master's and PhD. Thank you for always being inspiring and supporting, and most importantly, thank you for offering me a chance to study a PhD which later on brought me to recognise through this journey that I had never previously considered.

I would like to express my gratitude to both the University of Warwick and the China Scholarship Council for fully sponsoring my PhD studies. Their generosity erased my hesitation regarding doing a PhD was the right choice for me.

I would like to express my thanks to the 338 Professors and teaching Fellows in Q University for their participation and understanding. This research would have been impossible without their contribution.

I want to thank many of my friends and colleagues who shared great memories, provided accompany and support, and those staff members at the University of Warwick who helped me through my PhD journey. I also want to thank Warwick Art Centre, for giving me the opportunity to work there so that I could watch hundreds of free performances throughout my whole writing stage; they made my PhD journey more enjoyable.

Last but not least, I would like to show my endless gratitude to my parents who not only contributed to my data collection, but have always been supportive and encouraging no matter what had happened. Thank you for always being there for me through all the ups and downs and making me feel that I am not alone even when things went wrong. This thesis is dedicated to my parents, for their unconditional love.

Declaration

The work in this thesis was developed and conducted by the author between October 2015 and August 2018. I declare that, apart from work whose authors are explicitly acknowledged, this thesis and the materials contained in this thesis represent original work undertaken solely by the author. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Distributed leadership has become one of the most popular and important leadership models in the West, particularly in the field of education. However, both theoretical and empirical research into distributed leadership in the Chinese Higher Education context is rare. This dearth of literature motivated the researcher to conduct this study of a Chinese perspective on distributed leadership at the departmental level in a Chinese university. The aim of the research was to determine the extent to which leadership is distributed at the departmental level and the factors which influence leadership distribution in the Chinese context through the perceptions of Chinese Heads and other members of their Departments.

Multiple cases studies in four different university departments were adopted as the overall research approach. Each case study consisted of mixed methods research, utilising censuses, i.e. studies of all the members of each department, through questionnaires, followed by semi-structured interviews. Each case study comprised questionnaire censuses of leaders and staff members, plus interviews with samples of each. An additional set of interviews were carried out with university leaders, with the aim of examining the phenomenon from the institutional perspective.

The findings indicate that although the term 'distributed leadership' may not have been fully recognised by respondents, they did have a good understanding of its basic conceptual descriptions. Appropriate environments for the distribution of leadership had been established in each department in all of which leadership *is* distributed to some extent although the extents vary between departments. The mechanism of distributed leadership within the departments is mainly through role descriptions and designated jobs, which is theoretically called 'formal distribution'. In addition, pragmatic distribution and incremental distribution were also discovered, revealing the developing phase of top-down leadership approaches. Within this study, distributed leadership was thought to be

advantageous for organisational development, staff's self-efficacy and student performance. However, factors which may hinder its development were found to be the attitudes of some formal leaders, staff members' low willingness to participate in leadership activities, the University's centralised management system, and some elements of the Chinese culture. The main cultural elements thought to affect the distribution of leadership include collectivism, socialist elements, patriarchy, worshipping of tradition, enterprise, and moral and ethical self-cultivation. The importance of leadership training for all the staff members was also generally understood.

This study helps both domestic and foreign scholars to understand distributed leadership within the Chinese traditionally hierarchical context, implying that leadership distribution in its practical application can coexist with hierarchical organisational structures. The findings of the research also point to the importance of context-specific approaches to social science research.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Chapter

This thesis aims to provide a Chinese perspective on Distributed Leadership within several departments at a Chinese university. The difference between this study and most other studies of distributed leadership is its distinctive research context. Distributed leadership theory originated from a western context and has become the preferred model of educational leadership in the west. However, there are fewer studies describing the application of the model within a Chinese context. The purpose of this study is to examine how distributed leadership approaches are applied within this hierarchical Chinese model and how the distinctive Chinese cultural aspects shape the implementation of distributed leadership.

This chapter will now continue by expanding upon the rationale for the study by answering four main questions. These questions are *why* the researcher is doing it, *why* it is important, *who* and *how* will it help, and *what* it will contribute to the field of educational leadership. An overview of leadership in education will then be provided, including leadership in both schools and universities subsequently culminating in distributed leadership. As for the background to distributed leadership within this section, the challenges that facilitate distributed leadership will be explained, along with the importance of this leadership model, the reason for its popularity and the international context of distributed leadership. The author will then describe the specific context of the study in Section 1.4. by briefly introducing how the Chinese Education System and Chinese Higher Education System work. The section on Educational Leadership in China will introduce respectively leadership in schools and in Higher Education. Leadership in universities will be examined from the institutional level to the departmental level and the contents will include the development history of this leadership system. Section 1.6. addresses distributed leadership in China. A Description of the Subject University and Departments will be provided to help reader build a basic understanding of the Research University and Departments, followed by

the Purpose and Research Questions. Finally, there will be a summary of the chapter.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

The inspiration behind this PhD came from researcher's previous Master's dissertation which identified a gap between the quantity of distributed leadership studies within a western context, and the lack of studies within Chinese context. This dearth of data within the Chinese (mainland) context made it difficult to theorize distributed leadership. It was found that there were instances of distributed leadership practices within a Chinese Higher Education context (Lu, 2015). However, more data is required. Particular interest to this researcher were the conclusion that the hierarchical structure within Chinese higher education institutions seemed to result in a particular enactment of distributed leadership which seemed different to those observed within the English context. It is likely that the hierarchical system is shaping or has shaped the distributed leadership model, creating unique mechanisms, features and propensity.

Although recognition of this concept in China is less likely to be discovered from the literature, the preceding study conducted by this researcher ensures the empirical existence of distributed leadership in this research context and therefore provides a precondition for the research. Although the Chinese leadership system has been regarded as a hierarchical system since ancient days, it has its own dynamic and ongoing development process. The change may be not instant but is continuous. It is likely that the so-called hierarchical system is shaping or has shaped opposing leadership models such as distributed leadership but with their own specific mechanisms, features and degrees. Therefore, it is necessary to utilise an empirical approach to identify leadership in the socio-cultural context. This requires the researcher to have both knowledge of leadership theory and a profound understanding of the Chinese current leadership systems and of Chinese culture. Qualified in both two requirements, the researcher has conducted this study to reveal how distributed leadership develops in the hierarchical Chinese context and illustrate how important it is.

From the macroscopic level, it may give some awareness of distributed leadership to the Government and policy makers and hopefully make some contribution to the Chinese educational system. From the microscopic level, there may well be a lack of knowledge and understanding of distributed leadership, and so it is hoped that this study will assist leaders and other academics to build a recognition of this concept. This may promote collaboration between members within an institution, and also facilitate organisational development.

By utilising western theory in a non-western context, this study may help both foreign and domestic scholars gain a better understanding about distributed leadership in China. It adds more knowledge to the field of educational leadership by demonstrating that distributed leadership is also a suitable leadership model in hierarchical contexts. This also inspires further research into this aspect. Of particular interest is the application of a distributed model of leadership within hierarchical context as the author speculates that it is possible to consider distributed leadership as a balance between extreme hierarchy and anarchism. As there is no perfect model but there may be *a perfect model in a specific context,* several researchers have explained that distributed leadership is a context-based model which means the degrees, mechanisms and development processes of distributed leadership in certain contexts are influenced by the other elements such as culture (Spillane, 2012). Thus this study seeks to explore this within the Chinese context.

1.3. Leadership in Education

1.3.1. Leadership in Education

There is an increasing interest across the globe in researching educational leadership. Hallinger and Huber (2012, p. 359) record the great scholarly efforts by writing that "while conceptual and empirical efforts were initially

concentrated in North America, the past decade has witnessed the evolution of interest in "leadership for learning" into a global phenomenon spanning North America, Europe and Asian Pacific". There were a dramatically increasing number of empirical studies into school leadership during the 1980s and 1990s. Since this period, the positive relationships between leadership and school improvement and learning have been addressed; OfSED (2000) shows that effective leadership is one of the key constituents in improving school achievements. Also, researchers are stimulated by educational policy and the globalization to recognize how educational practices vary around the world; Harris (2002) mentions that research in diverse school contexts and different countries have proved that leadership has a great impact on securing school change and development. Hallinger and Huber (2012, p. 360) wrote:

> This sparked a new interest in exploring the potential value offered by international and comparative perspectives on leadership practice. This, in turn, has also led to an ever- expanding volume of conceptual and empirical research aimed at understanding leadership practice and effects across different national contexts.

1.3.2. Leadership in Higher Education

The complexity of leadership within Higher education is pointed out by Marshall (2006). According to Marshall, leadership in Higher Education is a multifaceted and complex process that must place an emphasis on the individual improvement and organisational development. Szekeres (2004) argues that over the last two decades, higher education has been claimed as being in a plethora of change including: an increase in marketization and managerialism, increasing investigation alongside wider assigned responsibility (audit), and a changing operations and structures on corporate institutions (corporatization). This has resulted in increased resentment from academic staff due to the impending leadership crisis, authority reduction, and new established administration procedures (Coates, Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Geodegebuure and Meek, 2009). However, universities currently are facing both challenges of creating

chances to build and develop sustainable leadership while simultaneously competing in globalization (Jones, 2012).

Bryman's (2007) study aims to identify effective leadership in Higher Education. By systematically analysing literature from the UK, the USA and Australia, Bryman proposes that there are 13 leadership behaviours that facilitate successful leadership at a departmental level within higher education. Those leader behaviours include:

- A clear sense of direction/strategic vision
- Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set
- Being considerate
- Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity
- Being trustworthy and having personal integrity
- Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions
- Encouraging open communication
- Communicating well about the direction the department is going
- Acting as a role model and having credibility
- Creating a positive/ collegial work atmosphere
- Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and eternal to the university
- Providing feedback on performance (Bryman, 2007, p. 697).

Bryman also claims two specific leadership behaviours associated with research-oriented institutions or institutions with strong research cultures and traditions. For achieving effective leadership, leaders should "provide resources for and adjust workloads to stimulate scholarship and research" and "make academic appointments that enhance the department's reputation" (p. 703).

1.3.3. Distributed Leadership

1.3. 3.1. The New Challenges

Effective leadership in schools is required more than ever with the rapidly changing climate and increasing expectations (Harris, 2013). The importance of effective leadership in schools is clearly justified by McKinsey (2007, p. 71):

> School reforms rarely succeed without effective leadership both at the level of the system and at the level of the individual schools. There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. Similarly we did not find a single school system, which had been turned around that did not possess sustained, committed and talented leadership.

The quality of leadership is pointed out as having the most significant impact on students' learning performance, second only to instruction and curriculum (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins., 2006). Leithwood et al. (2006, p. 29) further note its powerful influence on organisational development by stating that:

> Leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation. Those in leadership roles have a tremendous responsibility to 'get it right'.

Global change accelerates the climate of demand for different institutional forms and this provides a precondition for distinct leadership models to appear; however, it is impossible to define the best way of leading as the effective leadership is context related and context-specific (Harris, 2013). Harris (2013) points out that the new demands and challenges require leadership to be more flexible and diverse; meanwhile, it is also required to seize the challenges and complexities of globalizations and technological advancement. Friedman (2006) concludes that leadership should embody ingenuity, portability, flexibility and creativity. ESHA (European School Head Association) (2013) also emphasizes the scope of leadership should be enlarged beyond the school alone as the schooling organisations are facing increasing requirements in social, educational, administrative and political kinds.

Within the twenty-first century, it has been gradually recognized that the previous organisational and school structures could not satisfy the new learning requirements (Harris, 2013). The acute pressure for school leadership to change into a more distributed model is reflected in many global, national and local trends (Harris, 2013). Through financial transactions and world trades, the world economies are increasingly integrating and become more interdependent (Zhao, 2007). Traditional hierarchical leadership is gradually being considered as inappropriate as the link between organisations and individuals weaken, the organisational functions are geographically dispersed, and the activity patterns shift away from controlling and central location (Harris, 2013). As Duif, Harrison, van and Sinyolo (2013 p. 3) claim, "Twenty-first century schooling necessitates a shift away from vertical, policy driven change to lateral, capacity building change". The new school organisations require innovation and knowledge creation. The powerful forces for change contain changing employment opportunities, shifts in the pattern of school leaders' recruitment and globalizations (Harris, 2013). Similarly, the new schooling is established based on networking, collaboration and multi-agency working (extended schools, networked learning communities, partnerships, federations, etc.) (Harris and Spillane, 2008). These 'collaborative enterprises' are virtual and networked systems including potential and actual partners and allies (Heckscher, 2007). A more responsive leadership is required to satisfy these complex and new school forms and traverse the current new institutional landscape (Harris and Spillane, 2008).

Liu and Xu (2012) point out another challenge that leaders in the 21st century are facing. As Liu and Xu argue, in the 'knowledge economy', leaders are facing challenges with an increasing number of staff that have increasing amounts of knowledge and many qualities, which results in them displaying leadership abilities and motivation for leadership roles. Liu and Xu further explain that compared with formal leaders, those members that are in informal leadership roles know more about the practical situations so that they can solve unexpected issues in a reasonable approach. This knowledge has become the greatest

commodity within an organisation. When leadership lacks the knowledge required, an organisation can choose to either transfer the knowledge to those people with leadership power, or transfer the leadership power to those people that are with knowledge (Liu and Xu, 2012). Considering the difficulties to transfer the knowledge, the latter option becomes the top priority for new ventures and organisations. As Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss (2009b, p. 2) wrote:

> …the untapped and often unrecognized leadership capacities found among those not in positions of formal authority, and the extent to which the capacities of those at the organisational apex alone have been over taken by the complexities of the challenges they now face.

As Gunter, Hall and Bragg (2013) summarize, leadership is too large a task for one person as head teacher. Lambert (2002, p. 37) wrote:

> The days of the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators.

The increasing complexity of the role of the school principal is displayed not only within their political and managerial tasks, but also when attempting to meet the demands from reformers (Grubb and Flessa, 2006). In several jurisdictions, the pressures of external demands have grown substantially coupled with the frustrations with a lack of resources and time (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann and Petzko., 2003). As a result, there can be a lack of teachers willing to take leadership roles especially in urban areas (Gilman and Lanman-Givens, 2001). ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education) carried out a survey in 2012 aiming to map out the situation of school leadership in eleven European countries (ESHA, 2013, Duif et al., 2013). Good practices, school leadership policy, developments and emerging issues were investigated to promote school leadership (ESHA, 2013, Duif et al., 2013). The challenges facing principals were vaguely delimited and defined responsibilities, heavy and pressured

workload among principals, a reducing number of (potential) school principals (caused by the shortage of qualified applicants and retirement) and low profession attractiveness (ETUCE, 2012). According to National College of School Leadership (NCSL) (2006), over 59 percent of full-time heads in England are aged 50 or over while the number of heads predicted to retire in 2009 is predicted to soar to approximately 3500.

A government funded study, 'Independent Study of School Leadership' in the UK also presented that many school principals are struggling to satisfy all the requirements placed on them (DfES, 2007). Many principals make the statement of feeling unable to fully engage with the leadership responsibilities (Harris, 2013). In addition, it seems that those in other formal leadership roles are also resistant and reluctant to take on crucial leadership positions (Harris, 2013). Harris (2013) speculates that this is because they are best positioned to comprehend the demands and challenges of headship. This PhD seeks to discover whether this is applicable in universities in China. whether the hierarchical system also drives staff to be willing to take leadership responsibilities will need to be explored.

To address these challenges, leadership capacity and capability will need to be developed by removing barriers, redefining boundaries, altering structures, to ensure the involvement of the many instead of the few (Harris, 2013). Researches have shown that leadership need not be centralized in the principal, as teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders are also significant (Smylie and Denny, 1990). Leadership will be required in this 'collaborative enterprise' that is responsive, flexible and can realign itself to the changing needs and environment (Harris, 2013). Smith's research in English universities in 1995 also found that delegating some duties of the heads is the main approach to make larger organisations more manageable (Smith, 2005). "Unless the enterprise is very small, you would be wise to create a small management team, (but) it alone is not likely to carry out all the activities that are required" (Bolton, 2000, p. 100). It is the contention of Sahlberg (2011) that the top educational systems and high performing schools around the world emphasize more collective professional

expertise instead of individual capacity. Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 95) point out "in a complex, fast paced world, leadership cannot rest on the shoulders of the few". All of these statements point to a currently preferred model in the west, *distributed leadership*. Harris (2013) concludes:

> "Distributed leadership has these features and it is argued will play a major role in organisations of the future as the hierarchical structures and hierarchical forms of leadership fall away" (p. 116)
>
> And
>
> "Sustainable leadership has to be distributed leadership, which is firmly centered on learning (p. 30)".

1.3.3.2. 'Distributed Leadership is a Necessity Given the New Challenges for School'

As a currently preferred model in the west, distributed leadership has been regarded as a necessity given the new school challenges since 2005 (Collarbone, 2005). As Collarbone (2005, p. 827) historically notes at that time:

> … Leadership in many of our schools remains vested in the hands of one person, and in most of our schools with just a small number of individuals, and this continues to be based around existing hierarchies. The new demands upon schools will require new ways of working and to make them work will require a greater degree of team working and more widely distributed leadership authority.

The implementation of distributed leadership requires a shift in resource and power; this may generate resistance, derision or criticism from those traditional counterparts (Harris, 2013). However, distributed leadership is shown as possibly replacing traditional kinds of leadership that are criticized regarding their efficacy or ethics, such as transactional, top-down, collegial, charismatic, heroic,

with a new form of leadership (Lumby, 2013).

Distributed leadership is one of the most important developments in educational management and leadership since the mid-1990s (Tian, Risku and Collin, 2016). It has come to be regarded as a popular leadership model to theorize and research, seeking to present evidence and models for effective school practice (Gunter, 2013). The improvements in teaching and learning for professional learning communities are the ultimate goal of distributed leadership (Stoll and Seashore-Louis, 2007). Likewise, the popularity of distributed leadership means that it has "become the normatively preferred leadership model in the 21st century" (Bush, 2013, p. 543). As hierarchical leadership declines, a leadership practice based upon relationships instead of traditional organisational boundaries and divisions has replaced it (Harris, 2009). Indeed, distributed leadership is currently playing a major role and could also be in the future as it balances weaknesses and combines the capabilities of different individuals in our knowledge-based societies (Van, Nelson, Billsberry and Meurs, 2009). This could be reflected not only in education organisations but also in the context of new ventures. According to Ensley, Hmieleski and Pearce (2006), when paving the way for firm success, the power of distributed leadership is beyond the power of vertical leadership.

Spillane (2012) asserts that distributed leadership gives people a different framework to think about leadership, so that we could be able to utilize a new way to contemplate the old phenomenon. The framework of distributed leadership is approximately closer to leadership on the ground than many popular and conventional recipes for leadership in schools (Spillane, 2012). The dominant difference between distributed leadership and conventional leaderships is that practice of distributed leadership "is typically equated with the actions of a practitioner and seen as a function of the practitioner's knowledge (or lack thereof)" (p. 88). It is the contention of Elmore (2000) that although some of the school functions such as finance need to be controlled, school improvement should not be able to be controlled fully since the improvement of knowledge does not reside in the people who manage them but in the people who deliver

instruction. This particular way of thinking about leadership assumes that interactions and situations between leaders and followers are highly significant in leadership practices (Spillane, 2012). Its framework is distinguished with traditional accounts in which leadership practice means practitioner's actions and is regarded as a function of their own knowledge (Spillane, 2012).

1.3.3.3 The Reason for the Popularity of Distributed Leadership

Scholars illustrate the reason for the popularity of distributed leadership from different perspectives. According to Zepke (2007, p. 302), the *interest* in distributed leadership arose as "distributed leadership roles among senior teachers promised to lighten the workload of principals, who were often burdened by the demands of school improvement". As Gronn (2002, p. 429) wrote:

> The most compelling reason why the scholarly community requires a distributive perspective on leadership is that the idea more accurately reflects the division of labour which confronts fieldworkers and is experienced on a daily basis by organisation members.

Hartley (2007 cited in Hairon and Jonathan, 2015, p. 693) advocates that the popularity of distributed leadership can be due to "contemporary reforms in the public service that demands greater 'joined-up' or 'network' regime of governance". It is a social culture wherein 1) knowledge economy creates the new work order (where people learn and work beyond administrative enclosures by utilizing their temporal and spatial code) and 2) all classifications and categories are rendered and weakened increasingly flexible (Hartley, 2007 cited in Hairon and Jonathan, 2015).

Hatcher (2005) identifies two reasons for the prominence of distributed leadership in the *literature*. Firstly, it is more effective to achieve the fulfilment through wider engagement of staff in implementing changes. Secondly, Hatcher

(2005) claims that the experiences and skills of different people are more likely to achieve successful leadership in the current complex world. Harris (2013) wrote that there are two dominant reasons for the *implementation* of distributed leadership in schools. Firstly, it is the authority to release schools from the inflexible and rigid structures of leadership; secondly, it is the potential_to combine teaching and learning more closely with leadership practices. The empirical evidence can be discovered from the 'Raising Achievement Transforming Learning Project' (RATL), which includes over 300 England schools (Harris, 2013). The aim of this project was to help schools find innovative new approaches to work together, through enabling a variety of leadership models to be tested within schools (Harris, 2013). The final report emphasized the requirement of sharing leadership responsibilities even "more widely within and across schools" for achieving sustainable school improvement (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2007 cited in Harris, 2013).

Harris and Spillane (2008) argue that the popularity of distributed leadership is due to its *normative* power, *representative* power, and its *empirical* power. Firstly, it is due to its normative power of distributed leadership as it presents the contemporary leadership changes in school context (Harris and Spillane, 2008). The increasing 'greedy works' (termed by Gronn, 2003) have led to the expansion of leadership responsibilities and tasks, which require leadership to be more distributed (Harris and Spillane, 2008). Secondly, distributed leadership has its representative power, as it represents the "alternative approaches to leadership that have arisen" due to increasingly new demands in twenty-first centuries and challenges faced by schools (p. 31). Finally, empirical power refers to the benefits for student learning performance and organisational development the distributed leadership has been proven to achieve (Harris and Spillane, 2008).

1.3.3.4. The International Context of Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership has gone through several developmental stages. Harris (2012) wrote that although the term distributed *leadership* comes into the lexicon

of social science in 2006, previously it has been noted by practitioners, reformers and scholars since 2001. While there has been a great deal of research into distributed leadership, most studies are based on theoretical and conceptual aspects (ESHA, 2013). In 2003, there was limited empirical knowledge of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2012, Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey, 2003). From 2002 to 2007, there were 32 studies of distributed leadership ranging from small case studies of distributed leadership in practice to more general studies of effective leadership (Young, 2007, Timperley, 2005). Empirical enquiry has not been considered as the central focus in many of these studies (Harris, 2013). *Until 2007,* There were only four large-scale studies focusing on identifying the relationship between organisational or learning outcomes and distributed leadership (Camburn, Rowan and Taylor, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, Diamond and Jita 2003 and Spillane and Diamond, 2007; Spillane and Sherer, 2004). Until 2008, empirical studies about distributed leadership were in relatively short supply (Harris, 2008). But this has changed by 2013 (ESHA, 2013).

Importantly, in terms of the *research context*, most of the literatures of distributed leadership are written in the school context (Edwards, 2014). Spillane (2012) writes that most of the work has been carried out in primary and elementary schools. In the early stage, "the work by Spillane et al. (2004) and Spillane and Zoltners Sherer (2004) in particular highlights linkages between distributed leadership practice in elementary schools and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in particular subject areas" (Harris, 2013, p. 37). Edwards (2014) further adds that compared to the school context, the research base in Higher Education is even less prolific, probably because the theory of distributed leadership originates from the school context. However, there should be more studies addressed within the Higher Education Sector. As Floyd and Fung (2017) argue, "distributing leadership is even more important in higher education institutions than in other organisations as academics are well educated, largely autonomous and trained to be highly critical and so are more likely to oppose and challenge more traditional leadership models and behaviours" (p. 1490).

The desire to explore alternative forms of collaboration and communication between and across schools lead to the accumulation of the interest in distributed leadership (Harris, 2013). It has been researched abundantly in western countries especially USA, UK and Australia. In England, alternative models of distributed leadership appear in schools in the form of leadership teams, assistant heads, co-headships and executive heads who supervise several schools in partnerships or federations (Harris, 2013). Policy makers and stakeholders are employing distributed leadership extensively as the main way to implement change in schools (Jones, 2014). NCSL (2011) in the UK argues that official agencies are promoting more and more schools to implement distributed leadership. Study in Australia (Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford, 2005) found that better school performance could be achieved through a wider involvement of stakeholders into the leadership and decision-making process. "The leadership approaches adopted by the heads and principals in these successful schools could be characterized as widely distributed" (Harris, 2013, p. 48). Between 2005 and 2011, 61 leadership projects were funded and 37 of them employed the distributed leadership approaches (Jones, 2012). Nowadays, "the extension of distributed leadership into higher education sector in the UK and Australia is being explored as a new *architecture for leadership"* (Jones, 2014, p. 606).

However, the *research focuses* of distributed leadership are different in these countries (Jones, 2012). The empirical ideas of the implementation of distributed leadership in schools especially primary and secondary schools are the main research emphasis in USA (Jones, 2012). The research of distributed leadership in the UK is more likely to focus on the theoretical conceptualization in all three education sectors, whereas in Australia, the exploration of distributed leadership is conducted in both the secondary sector and higher education context (Jones, 2012). Meanwhile, the proportion of publications regarding distributed leadership in England is also much higher than the USA (Bolden, 2011). Bolden suggests that this is partly due to the impact of the National College of teaching and learning, which has embraced the idea within many of its publications. Bolden (2011, p. 256) speculates that the different proportion of publication in each country proves "subtle differences in the ways in which leadership is

conceived and enacted in different contexts".

It is noted that the evidence of distributed leadership can be easily found in other European countries. A study by ESHA (2013, p. 3) reports that the majority of school leaders in eight European countries perceive that "school leadership is demonstrably distributive". It is acknowledged that within Europe, leadership is more likely to be distributed in Norway, Sweden, England and Scotland, and it is less likely to be distributed in Spain, France and Italy (ESHA, 2013). Finland was the top educational performer in 2007 (Harris, 2013). In Finland, schooling is not regarded as a private good but a public service that relies on the main values of responsibility, co-operation and trust (Harris, 2013). Teachers are allocated into the leadership team on a temporary basis since formal hierarchy does not exist among teachers in Finish schools (Lahtero, Lång and Alava, 2017). In order to improve the professional skills of teachers, researches were conducted in schools in forms of networking and collaboration (Sahlberg, 2011). Nowadays, teachers in Finland have time to work together during school time and are motivated to be innovative, encouraged to challenge and think differently (Harris, 2014).

Lahtero et al. (2017) carried out a study of distributed leadership in Finland, aiming to identify the relationship between the perception of distributed leadership and influence factors, and how distributed leadership affects student performance. The research was carried out within 45 primary schools and 5 upper secondary schools by employing open-structured questionnaires. Although Duif et al. (2013) claim that the use of distributed leadership may be lessened when the school size is bigger and the school level is higher, the findings of this study show that the perception about distributed leadership is not significantly influenced by the influence factors including respondents' age, the number of teachers and students, school size and school type, but is influenced by the respondents' role and leadership training. Meanwhile, the perception of whether distributed leadership has an influence on students depends on the respondents' positions; respondents in higher leadership roles are more likely to think it important.

In contrast, Tashi (2015) argues that although there is a remarkable progress in conceptual development, the popularity of distributed leadership remains quite restricted to particular sectors and geographic areas even in Europe. For example, there was no distributed leadership research conducted in Hungary until 2013 and the term was not used frequently in educational literature (Révai and Schnellbach, 2013). Révai and Schnellbach (2013, p. 5) wrote, "studies display very little about nature of distributed leadership, but at the same time distributed leadership in Hungary is an issue that is gaining increasingly more importance". Révai and Schnellbach (2013) acknowledge that in Hungary, some answers to survey questions have indicated existing cultures and leadership structures have been open enough to accept distributed leadership attitudes, needs and conditions.

There is some evidence of distributed leadership outside of the European context. For example, Tashi (2015) carried out the study of distributed leadership in Bhutanese schools which aimed to examine teachers' perception of engagement in distributed leadership. The factors influencing distributed leadership within this study were characterized into school and individual perspectives, which included school location, school type, experience and qualification of the respondents, and also gender. 150 teachers from forty-four schools were randomly selected and voluntarily chose to be involved. This research was based on the theory of the four dimensions of distributed leadership ('mission, vision and goals'; 'school culture'; 'shared responsibility'; and 'leadership practices') from Gordon (2005). Tashi (2015) found that compared with female teachers, male teachers had a higher engagement with distributed leadership practices, as did more senior teachers especially those with higher levels of qualification. These findings are somewhat contradictory to those of Camburn (2003). Camburn found in 2003 that there is no difference between genders on instructional leadership with regard to distributed leadership.

Because of the conceptual elusiveness of distributed leadership, Hairon and Goh (2015) conducted distributed leadership research in Singapore context aiming to measure the conceptual construct of distributed leadership by "addressing

possible dimensionality issues" (p. 693). Research involved 224 primary, secondary schools and junior colleges in Singapore. By employing the questionnaire survey, the researchers invited 1232 school leaders to participate into the study. The research framework was based on three dimensions of distributed leadership which were respectively 'empowerment', 'interaction for shared decision', and 'development for leadership'. It was acknowledged that within Singaporean schools, cultural and social values play an important role in distributed leadership. Hairon and Goh wrote that, "Specifically, Singapore school leaders draw upon Asian cultural values for collectivism and hierarchy, and economic pragmatism in the enactment of distributed leadership actions, and this significantly alters the way distributed leadership is understood and practiced in Singapore schools" (p. 712). Considering that culture values of Singapore are somewhat similar with Chinese cultural values, the above statement may be also applied as a reference when analysing research into distributed leadership in a Chinese context. However, while the cultural elements can be one of the variables that affect operationalization and conception of distributed leadership, Hairon and Goh (2015) notice that the different organisational structures in schools may also influence the enactment of distributed leadership.

Besides the two examples above, there is also recent literature from the Asian context. García Torres (2018) utilises secondary data to identify the correlation between the teachers' perception about distributed leadership and the job satisfaction of teachers in Singapore schools. The study reveals that "distributed leadership is not a leadership type but a framework for investigating processes endemic to leadership. It exists on a spectrum, the extent to which leadership is distributed and the form it takes may vary" (p. 129). The contexts specific natures of leadership approaches are emphasised again.

1.4. Context of the Study

1.4.1. Chinese Education System

The overview of Chinese Education System is given in this section. Education in Mainland China is a public state-run system run by the Ministry of Education. There are private, public and vocational schools. There are also kindergartens, primary schools, regular secondary schools, secondary technical schools, secondary teachers schools, senior high schools, senior high vocational schools, schools for the deaf and blind, and Higher Education institutions. The learning starts at kindergarten (age 2 to 6). According to the Compulsory Education Law, each child in China has to receive a nine-year compulsory education (Davey, De-Lian and Higgins, 2007). The nine-year compulsory education includes primary school (age 6 to 12) and junior middle school (age 12 to 15) (Davey et al., 2007). The senior high schools (middle school) or vocational schools are three-years education, followed by the junior middle school. The privileged few finish at Higher Education (Davey et al., 2007).

The institutions of Higher Education in China include regular universities and colleges, short-term vocational universities and professional colleges. There are two kinds of universities in China. Davey et al. (2007, p. 387) explain, "the first category awards undergraduate diplomas and bachelor degrees following four years of study, whereas the second group awards undergraduate diplomas after two or three years". The research university is in the first category. In order to enter the universities, it is of necessity to pass the Chinese university entrance exam (translating into Chinese as '*gaokao'*) (Davey et al., 2007). Apart from its ten years suspension caused by the cultural revolution during 1966-1977, the system was established in 1952 and implemented until now. The exam questions are written and overseen by the Ministry of Education. The local government takes responsibilities to arrange exams, print and deliver papers, and mark the results (Davey et al., 2007).

The Communist Party has played the significant role in Chinese education system since 1949, although the government has authority over the educational management (MoE, 2015). Under the lead with Xiaoping Deng, introduced education policies aimed at improving the quality of education and increase modernization. The implementation of educational policies within the institutions

and at the local level is monitored by the Communist Party (MoE, 2015). Within institutions, those party members play leadership roles that ensure that approaches are in line with Communist Party policy. The party member at the university level is called the Communist Party Secretory, whereas the party members at the departmental level is called the Party Branch Secretary.

1.4.2. Chinese Higher Education System

The current Chinese Higher Education System is gradually well established and deeply influenced by the Chinese modern history. During the battle against the Japanese Invasion (1937-45) and the War of Liberation (1946-49), Chinese universities underwent great hardship and was deeply influenced by the Western university model for over 50 years (from 1896 to 1949) (Duan, 2003). The turning point was the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1949. The political situations made the government change the attitudes towards the previously western university system and replace the western university model into Soviet Union's university model. In the early 1950s, Chinese Higher Education started to reorganise by remodeling disciplines. The focus of universities shifted from building comprehensive universities to disciplinary universities such as railway institutes, agricultural colleges, medical colleges, universities of engineering, universities of literature and arts and so on. These over 50 years have a far-reaching impact; there were decreasing numbers of Chinese comprehensive universities. While in the late 1990s, there was a reorganisation of Chinese Higher Education for building the comprehensive universities again (Duan, 2003).

In 1978, the establishment of *reform and opening up policy* draw closer the Chinese Higher Education system with Western world again (Duan, 2003). One of the dramatic milestone in history is to support students and academic scholars to the United States after the estrangement between two countries for nearly thirty years (Duan, 2003). Until 2003, there are 50,000 Chinese oversea students in the USA and the number has reached to 328,547 in 2015/2016; the proportion of Chinese students has taken up over thirty percent of USA international

students (Duan, 2003, EOL, 2016). Nowadays, there are an increasing number of Chinese students going abroad and most of them are doing so for Higher Education. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE, 2017), there are 544,500 oversea students in total only in 2016 and the numbers each year are still increasing. China is currently the top one country sending out oversea students (EOL, 2016). On the other side, the rapidly growing GDP in China helps Chinese economy integrate more into global economy (Min, 2004). This also brings more international communications between universities in Chinese Higher Education. Min (2004, p. 53) wrote, "the Chinese Higher Education has increased its degree of interaction with universities in other countries and now functions as part of the international academic community". Nowadays, most of the Chinese universities aim to make cooperation and culture intercommunication with oversea higher institutes for achieving internationalization in globalization.

Nowadays, the Chinese Higher Education system has become one of the largest educational systems around the world (Min, 2004). As Duan (2003, p. 24) claims, "A rapid expansion of colleges and universities has reduced the gap between the strong desire for higher education and the limited access to it". Until 2004, it already has over 3000 colleges and universities including full time universities, colleges for further education and private colleges and universities (Min, 2004). Meanwhile, the enrolments in Higher Education in total have risen from 1 million (in 1980s) to around 13 million in 2001 (Min, 2004).

Apart from the expansion of enrolments, the most important reforms of Chinese Higher Education system respectively comprise "the emergence of private institutions", "the adjustment of institutional governance", the recharge of tuition fee and the "cancellation of guaranteed job placement for graduates" which are explained as follows (Duan, 2003). As regards the emergence of private institutions, there was no private university or college in China until 1978 (Duan, 2003). The system used to be highly centralized (Min, 2004). Individuals and organisations are currently encouraged and supported to establish private schools and institutions due to the consciousness of the previous limited resources for

higher education expansion (Duo, 2003, Min, 2004). According to Min (2004, p. 71), the aim of promoting private higher education sector is to "mobilize more resources from the private sector to accelerate higher education development". In Higher Education, there are only 89 private institutions licensed by the Ministry of Education in China in 2001 (Duan, 2003). In 2015, the numbers of private colleges and other Higher Education institutes have respectively reached to 734 and 813 (MoE, 2016).

The adjustment of institutional governance refers to the *two-level education provision system* (central government and local government). Universities were lead solely by the Ministry of Education. With the economy system shifting from centralized economy to market economy, the centralized higher education system was also dramatically changed (Duan, 2003). As still the decisively and actively administrative body in Chinese education, the Ministry of Education not only administrates leading universities, but also implements education-related policies, guidelines, regulations, laws, national initiatives and programs, and manages international exchange and cooperation in education. With the *two-level education provision system* coming out, the education responsibilities are initiatively shared by both Ministry of Education (central government) and provincial bureaus of education (local governments). Duan (2003, p. 25) further explains, "the provincial bureaus of education have been assigned greater responsibilities and now directly administer most common universities and colleges." Nominated by the government, the president is the universities' main executive officer (Duan, 2003). It helps bring more experienced presidents into helping solve the problem within the system.

The policy of tuition fee was also changed. The tuition fee of Higher Education was guaranteed and funded by public government until early 1990s (Duan, 2003). According to Duan, the growth of marketing economy results in the charges of tuition fees by colleges and universities and abolishment of the old job placement system. The new employment system was established after several years of experimentation and practice; students start to search for the employee by themselves. Beforehand, due to the free tuition fee, the Chinese government will

assign the university students to certain jobs in certain places. Duan (2003, p. 26) wrote that:

> In the old system, all graduates received the same starting salary no matter what they had majored in, or the kind of work the government assigned to them. Now, salaries of new graduated vary depending on the classification of their job, the region in which they work, and the offerings of individual employers. Many graduates even seek jobs with better salaries and benefits in branches of top foreign companies in China.

One of the big challenges in Chinese Higher Education sector is the regional disparity. Although Chinese economy grows rapidly over the past two decades, all the provinces have varying gaps between each other (Min, 2004). For example, according to NBSC (National Bureau of Statistics of China), in the year of 2016, the total GDP in *Guangzhou* province is 25 times higher than the total GDP in *Ningxia* province. The sharp regional disparities in economy are also reflected in higher education. The uneven gap not only exists in university quantity but also in quality. Most of the top universities are located in cities with advanced economies such as Beijing and Shanghai; while the provinces with low developing economies have less universities or universities with relatively low quality. Although the situation is still currently existed and obvious, policies have been launched to narrow the gap between universities in eastern and western part of China. The central government requires each of the leading university in developed region twin with another university located in less developed area. Those leading universities are demanded to provide alternative supports including faculty development, donation of equipment, curriculum development and increasing enrolment capacity (Min, 2004).

1.5. Educational Leadership in China

1.5.1. Leadership in School

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, educational leadership in Chinese schools has gone through stages of *instability*, *disorder* and *recovery and reconstruction* (Jin and Peng, 2016). In the early stage of new China (around 1956), educational leadership was unstable and centralized. Considering that the planned economy had a negative impact on initiatives, a series of decentralized policies for socialist construction was launched in 1958. In the field of education, the responsibilities of school leadership and management were allocated to provincial bureaus and local governments. However, in 1968, policy makers centralized the power of school leadership into Party Committee and central government again. Since then, the centralized and hierarchical leadership model in Chinese education was established. Afterwards, in the chaos of the great proletarian Cultural Revolution, educational leadership system was nearly paralyzed (Jin and Peng, 2016). As Giles, Park and Wang (2008, p. 2) wrote, "one consequence of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a radical political campaign in 1966 was the wide spread disruption to China's educational system from 1966 to 1976. The schooling of many Chinese citizens was delayed or cut short". After all these twists and turns, in order to recover and reconstruct the school leadership, policy makers re-emphasized the importance of a hierarchical leadership model. According to Jin and Peng (2016), schools are managed by the provincial local government under the leadership of the Party Committee.

1.5.2. Leadership in Higher Education

The development of the leadership system in Chinese Higher Education can be categorized into seven chronological stages (Du, 2014). Table 1.1 shows these stages commencing with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Now the approach is called the Principal Responsibility System under the Leadership of the Party Committee (Du, 2014).

Table 1.1 The changes of leadership system and pattern in Chinese Higher Education

	Years	The Name of Leadership System

One-man Management System	1950-1956	The Principal Responsibility System
Community System	1956-1961	The School Community Responsibility System under the Leadership of The Party Committee
	1961-1966	The School Community Responsibility System headed by The Principal under the Leadership of The Party Committee
	1966-1976	Led by the Revolutionary Committee
Principal System	1976-1985	The Principal Division Responsibility System Under the Leadership of The Party Committee
	1985-1989	The Principal Responsibility System (trial)
	1989-Until Now	The Principal Responsibility System under the Leadership of the Party Committee

The Principal responsibility System was influenced by the One-Management System used by the Soviet Union Higher Education in 1950 to stabilize the management of universities at a time of great political and economic upheaval in the early stage of new People's Republic of China. Structure was implemented with the university, departments and scientific research groups. Principals were appointed by central government and had overall authority, nominating academic staff, and controlling all issues regarding teaching, management and administration. Other members of the University did not get involved with leading and managing. However, this highly centralized leadership put too much power into only one person, and had a high risk to cause dogmatism and heroism. Du (2014) point out that this One-Man Management system was contrary to the power of the Communist Party.

In order to achieve *decentralization*, the School Committee and the Party Committee were put into the leadership system. In 1957, socialist reform in China had been almost finished and China started to search for its own developmental model (Du, 2014). The Party Committee became the decision-maker whereas School Committee became the representative of supreme authority. This system reform reinforced the management of the universities by the Chinese government. The participation of the School Committee enabled more members to lead universities. However, the involvement of both the Communist Party and the School Committee led leadership of universities to chaos. In 1961, the School Community Responsibility System headed by The Principal under the Leadership of The Party Committee was established. Principals possess the greatest power once again. However, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution lasting for ten years paralyzed the whole leadership system in Chinese universities. The universities stopped recruiting staff and students and were led by the Revolutionary Committee until the establishment of *the Reform and Opening-up Policy* in 1978 (Du, 2014).

In order to re-emphasize the importance of the principals within leadership system in Higher Education, the Principal System was finally established in 1978 (Du, 2014). Prior to the trial of The Principal Responsibility System, the leadership responsibilities were shared with both the principals and the Party Committee. Under the leadership of the Party Committee, it was argued that the principals still have no decision-making power. In 1985, the political autonomy of universities was strengthened and the trial of the Principal Responsibility System commenced. Compared with the old Principal Responsibility System in early 1950, the new Principal Responsibility system strengthened the democratic management and supervision by establishing a Congress of teaching and administrative staff. The supreme leadership position of the principals was addressed again, whilst government gradually lost control of universities. In 1989, the current leadership system was finally established by re-addressing the leadership position of the Party Committee with the aim of ensuring that university leadership complies with government guidance. Under the supervision

of the Party Committee, the university principals have the independence to manage universities in terms of teaching and learning, researching and administrative works. An Academic Committee has also been established to help improve academic development (Du, 2014).

1.6. Distributed Leadership in China

Although institutional constrains may hinder distributed leadership, some scholars confirmed the distribution of leadership exists in the most tightly structured and hierarchically configured organisational context (Harris 2013; Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, Leithwood, Gu, Pelington, Mehta and Kington, 2009). Although it may not be labelled as distributed leadership, there are practices which suggest the existence and development of distributed leadership in China. For example, in Hong Kong, policy makers have developed district level clusters and learning communities to reinforce schools' implementation of new pedagogy (Harris, 2014). Curriculum team leaders are assigned to monitor reforms and help staff to learn from each (Harris, 2014). According to Jensen (2012, p. 37), "these curriculum team leaders are the champions of effective implementation of new pedagogy".

There are also some clues of distributed leadership in schools of Mainland China. In Shanghai, teachers work together to develop new resources, materials, and insights through network meetings and research groups (Harris, 2014). Harris (2014, p. 30) wrote that, in this circumstance, "teachers are viewed as researchers who lead reform and implement new pedagogy". Likewise, it has been proved that distributed leadership does also appear and exist in Chinese Higher Education. The researcher of this study previously conducted a study about the extent to which leadership is distributed in the Department of Chemical Engineering in a Chinese University; the finding shows that distributed leadership has developed in Chinese context with the influence of Chinese culture (Lu, 2015).

In the head quarter of Confucius Institute in China, distributed leadership is

supported by keeping a splendid communication system, a system between an individual institutes and headquarters, within individual institutes and their communities (Chang Li, Mirmirani and Ilacqua, 2009). According to the findings of the study, with the influence of global cultures, the establishment and operation of Confucius Institutes can show that China has gone through both social and cultural changes. Knowledge sharing and distributed leadership are currently practiced by both profit seeking ventures and Confucius Institutes. Chang Li et al. (2009, p. 469) acknowledge that:

> This leadership style, combined with a knowledge-sharing network is also suitable for the situational variables encountered in making thousands of decision across hundreds of global locations by both learning institutions and business organisations.

This study helps erase the empirically doubt of distributed leadership's function in Chinese context. When dealing with both socio-political and cultural conditions in countries such as China, Chang Li et al. (2009) recommend that the collection of distributed leadership and knowledge sharing network can be considered as one of the most effective approaches for organisational development.

1.7. Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on providing a Chinese perspective on Distributed leadership within four case departments in a Chinese university. With the development of a knowledge-based economy and globalisation, traditional leadership has been considered as inappropriate because of the geographical dispersal of organisational functions and the excessive burdens and pressures on formal leaders. From the theoretical perspective, distributed leadership has been researched abundantly in the West, while there is a dearth of such literature in China and especially in Chinese universities. In fact, there are a limited number of identified instances of distributed leadership practice in Chinese universities (Zhao, 2015, Lu, 2015). However, the researcher's previous study (Lu, 2015) found that the practice of distributed leadership does exist in at least this Chinese

university, although the term itself had not yet been properly defined or recognised. In particular, as mentioned earlier, this previous study seemed to indicate that the manifestation of distributed leadership in Chinese universities might be significantly different to that in Western universities due to the hierarchical nature of Chinese leadership structures and the influence of other aspects of Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, more data is required to confirm that distributed leadership does, in fact, exist and to identify how it is manifested in this particular context.

Thus, the aim of this research is to determine the extent to which leadership is distributed at the departmental level, how it is manifested differently and the factors which influence its distribution in the Chinese context through the perceptions of Chinese Heads and other members of Departments. The researcher addressed the following seven research questions:

In this Chinese Universities (QUT),

- To what extent is the concept of distributed leadership recognized?
- To what extent is leadership distributed in practice?
- By what mechanisms are leadership distributed?
- What are the beneficial effects of distributed leadership?
- What are the disadvantages of and barriers to distributed leadership?
- How are leadership skills developed?
- What are the cultural aspects/dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership in this Chinese University?

1.8. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has given an overview of a thesis on a Chinese perspective on Distributed Leadership at the departmental level in a Chinese university. Firstly, the author has briefly explained what the whole study is about, the purpose of the study and the structure of the chapter. Secondly, the author has outlined the rationale for the study by answering four questions. They are associated with *why* the researcher is doing it, *what* it is important, *who* and *how* will it help, and *what*

it will contribute to the field of educational leadership. Thirdly, leadership in education has been highlighted to exhibit leadership in both schools and higher education contexts, and culminating in distributed leadership. Within this section, the author has respectively examined the challenges that facilitate distributed leadership, the importance of this leadership model, reason for the popularity and the international context of distributed leadership. Next context of the study has been discussed justifying Chinese education system and Chinese higher education system. The author has subsequently outlined educational leadership in Chinese institutions of both schools and universities. Drawing on from the institutional level to the departmental level, the change of leadership system has been formulated. The section of distributed leadership in China is followed by a description of the Subject University and departments. Purpose and research questions are then given. Finally, this chapter finishes with summary of the chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the literature regarding a Chinese perspective on distributed leadership. Firstly, it begins by addressing the history of distributed leadership. The author then expands upon the definitions and concepts of distributed leadership. The differences between distributed leadership and other leadership models (i.e. dispersed leadership, shared leadership, collaborative leadership, democratic leadership, transformational leadership and teacher leadership) are also discussed in this section. Thirdly, in the section of Distributed Leadership in General, the researcher introduces a number of different theoretical classifications of distributed leadership such as the Leadership-plus and the Leadership Practice aspects, the mechanisms of distributed leadership, power in distributed leadership, top-down and bottom-up approaches, designed organization and lived organization, collaborative, collective and coordinated distribution and seven dimensions of distributed leadership by ESHA.

It has to be acknowledged at this point that the nature of distributed leadership can be problematic. There are authors who do not support this model of leadership even though it is generally popular in the West. There are also critics and sceptics of the model such as Crawford (2012), Lumby (2013) etc. This is addressed further in Section 2.6.2 on page 67.

In Section 2.5., the advantages of distributed leadership are considered and this is followed by Section 2.6., the barriers and critiques of distributed leadership. A discussion of how leadership skills are developed (Section 2.7) is followed by section 2.8. introducing distributed leadership in practice which includes some empirical studies about distributed leadership in both schools and Higher Education settings. Within this section, the author also brief introduces some features of Higher Education and the current challenges of leadership in Higher Education. Distributed leadership with Chinese culture is finally discussed, by

respectively addressing Chinese culture elements that relate to educational leadership, leadership power in Chinese Higher Education, and the status quo of distributed leadership in China.

2.2. The History of Distributed Leadership

There have been many different types of leadership theories over the years. For example, the earliest leadership theories suggested that leaders are born with instinct rather than being made through training (Glasman and Glasman, 1997). In the trait theory, those who are leaders have certain personalities and abilities such as adaptability, empathy, integrity, intelligence (Stogdill, 1948). Behavior theory reveals the importance of leadership behaviors and situations (Chang Li et al., 2009). Over time, the concept of "group processes" and "relationship-oriented activities" are pointed out by several scholars and gradually replace "task-oriented performance" in leadership theories (Razik and Swanson, 1995 cited in Chang Li et al., 2009, p.471; Yukl, 1999 cited in Chang Li et al., 2009, p. 471).

Although the prevalence of distributed leadership occurs in recent years, the idea of distributed leadership is "as old as human efforts to organize" (Leithwood, 2009, p. 1). Tracing the history back to 1250 BC, Macbeath (2009, p. 41) discovers the earliest record from the Bible (Exodus 18:17-18): "this is too heavy for thou cannot bear it alone". It implies the practice of distributing leadership responsibilities. Distributed leadership was firstly illustrated in organizational theory and social psychology in the 1950s (Leithwood, 2009). An Australian psychologist, Gibb, utilized this term, distributed leadership, to make the distinction between *focused leadership*, when trying to find approaches of measuring the dynamic process of working in groups (Gibb, 1965). Focused leadership refers to the practices that are focused on the behaviors and traits of one person whereas distributed leadership refers to sharing and distributing leadership in collective actions (Harris, 2013). Gibb is considered as a pioneer to link leadership with social process and group interaction (Edwards, 2014).

In the 1960s, Gibb's research focus shifted from focused leadership to distributed leadership. The understanding of the term, *distributed leadership*, at that time, was similar to teacher leadership or shared leadership but still had a distinction with the current term of distributed leadership (Jiang, 2011). Since 1960s, the concept of distributed leadership has existed in organizational theories and educational leadership but in different forms (Jiang, 2011). As one of the first pioneers who emphasized dynamics of organizations, Barnard (1968) points out that the impact of leadership *flows through* organizational structures, instead of traveling only through a top-down approach.

Distributed leadership was articulated in the 1970s again, with numerous appearances in western leadership theories (Leithwood, 2009; Jiang, 2011). Traditional hierarchical organization patterns were replaced by a more shared and distributed network (Harris, 2013). Scholars shifted the research focuses into collective communications-making by individuals and pointed out numbers of terms including collective leadership, democratic leadership, shared leadership, distributed leadership and distributive leadership (Chang Li et al., 2009). The research focus at that time had moved towards discerning different forms of leadership (Crawford, 2012); however, distributed leadership "in the wake of the rampant individualist exceptionalism of the 1980s-1990s" (Gronn, 2004, p. 352), was only valued as "a rallying-point for those commentators searching for post-heroic leadership alternatives" (Gronn, 2009, p. 18). During the 1990s, the issues of the interest in researching different models of leadership and their relation to practice can still be discovered within the literature (Crawford, 2012). In the late 1990s, distributed leadership finally started to gain currency mainly within the literature of school improvement (Zepke, 2007).

The contemporary idea of distributed leadership was not defined until the late 1990s and early 2000s (Harris, 2013). For example, distributed leadership was early pointed out to be understood as "being a web of leadership activities and interactions stretched across people and situations" (p. 37). In the USA, the Council of Chief State School Officers officially mentioned the term in 2000 by declaring that educational organizations ought to have "distributed leadership

teams" and improve leaders "working effectively in multiple leadership" (NCSL, 2004, p. 10). In the UK, the concept came to prominence in 2003 when NCSL referred to it as a valuable approach in the literature of school leadership development (Bennett et al., 2003).

Distributed leadership at the beginning of the millennium was at its early stage with less study (Tian et al., 2016). The settings of the studies that Bennett et al. (2003) reviewed to expand the theory include business, public service, social community and education. By focusing on two areas, *conceptualization* and *application*, they pointed out two primary research gaps, namely, an absence of an agreed definition; and a lack of quality empirical studies. As for conceptualization, at that time, distributed leadership was initially regarded as an analytical approach to examine the interaction in leadership practices (Bennett et al., 2003). The absence of a widely accepted and specific definition becomes one of the main challenges for conducting distributed leadership studies (Tian et al., 2016). Besides the weak conceptual foundation, another research gap is that there are insufficient empirical studies of practices and impacts of distributed leadership (Tian et al., 2016).

In the 21st century, there has been an abundant body of literature appearing and distributed leadership becomes prevalent (Jiang, 2011). Compared with the period from 1996 to 2002, there are increasing numbers of distributed leadership studies conducted from 2002 to 2013 (Tian et al., 2016). Youngs (2007) argues that from 2002 to 2007, the number of distributed leadership studies are thirty-two; they contain small case studies, teacher leadership, effective leadership studies and even literacy related studies. According to Tian et al. (2016), between 2002 and 2013, there are over 720,000 journal articles published in total on this topic. Apart from the field of education, distributed leadership has also been adopted in the field of health care, business and other professions (Cannatelli, Smith, Giudici, Jones and Conger, 2017; Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie and Baeza, 2007; Fitzsimons, James, and Denyer, 2011).

Together with quantity, the methodology and scale of studies evolved (Tian et al.,

2016). According to Bennett et al. (2003, p. 6) in 2003, most of studies were "small-scale qualitative case studies", whereas distributed leadership studies nowadays are conducted with more variations such as empirical studies, comparative studies and also studies with meta-analysis (Tian et al., 2016). Research methods have consisted of quantitative approach based on surveys, qualitative approaches by using case studies, observations, interviews, and mixed methods (Tian et al., 2016). Tian et al. illustrate that leadership distribution in practice has also shifted from sharing tasks to collaborative communications and subsequently to a hybrid of hierarchical and heterarchical leadership approaches, individual and collective, which can be considered as empirical frameworks. Globally, distributed leadership studies have become more complicated and versatile findings according to the context. It is of note that general findings can be discovered while the subscription and interpretation of distributed leadership in practice are heavily context based (e.g. social and cultural contexts). Tian et al. (2016, p. 152) comment, "Thus, findings of the studies cannot be regarded as universal truths but should be examined in various contexts to obtain broader verification".

As for the research focus, according to Hartley (2010), most of distributed leadership studies are categorized into the dimension of *social regulation* instead of *radical change*. In this sense, Hartley explains that the research aims to interpret and understand rather than changing; whereas Timperley (2009) categorizes the difference as descriptive and normative. Descriptive approach relates to statements of the facts whereas normative refers to evaluating values and rules as a standard. According to Timplerley, the early infant stage of studies was mainly descriptive (e.g. Gronn, 2003a, Spillane and Sherer, 2004). The essential function of descriptive studies helped develop analytical approaches and frameworks to examine how leadership is distributed. Timperley acknowledges its contribution and argues that this helped researchers emphasize "actors in situations working with artifacts, rather than actors abstracted from situations or artifacts" (Spillane and Sherer, 2004, p. 9). The orientation of studies by latter writers (e.g. Camburn et al., 2003; Day and Harris, 2003) was more likely to be normative as the number of people within organisations was

increasing. In this circumstance, distributed leadership was a more desirable approach due to its possibility to develop teacher's professional and intellectual ability. Instead of paying attention to building taxonomies, these latter writers were concerned more with examining "whether more leadership positions have been created, and if so, how different leadership functions are distributed across them" (p. 198). According to their studies, greater leadership distribution is related to overall organisational reforms. However, although differences between the descriptive and normative studies exist, there was a consensus that there should be more empirical studies (Timperley, 2009).

Harris (2013, p. 118) proposes that distributed leadership nowadays is still "*theoretically* rich and *empirically* poor". Harris (2014) says that definitional and methodological aspects are emphasized more in literatures but there is a lack of research identifying *how* leadership is distributed. However, Tian et al. (2016) disputes that studies are theoretically rich, arguing that although researchers over the past ten years have dedicated themselves to fill the conceptual gap of distributed leadership, from the theoretical perspective, a consensus of '*what distributed leadership is'* has not been reached yet. Furthermore, Tian et al. claim that regarding the research focus of distributed leadership, leadership is not viewed as "an agency that allowed individuals to have an active role in the organisation" but as "a resource from an organisational point of view" (p. 152). Even so, it must be admitted that the prevalence of distributed leadership has swept through the field of educational leadership and shows the impression of "offering something revitalizing and inclusive in some of its manifestations" (Lumby, 2013, p. 581). Youngs (2007, p. 1) points out "issues of popularization mean that distributed forms of leadership may end up being yet another 'fad'". Spillane et al. (2004) and Harris (2014) explain that distributed leadership theories should be mainly considered as a tool or analytical device instead of being a prescription or prediction, as it just provides one of the approaches to interpret and understand leadership practice.

Meanwhile, it remains the case that there is still a gap in the literature relating to distributed leadership within the Higher Education setting until now. This is

revealed by Edwards (2014, p. 32) arguing "empirical studies of distributed leadership have so far failed to take into account a holistic account of the roles of both formal leaders and the leadership activity of academic staff within a higher education setting". Gosling, Bolden and Petrov (2009) review distributed leadership literature in Higher Education contexts and claim that those informal leaders at the departmental level are not paid much attention by researchers in distributed leadership studies in Higher Education institutions. This literature gap is one of issues that this thesis aims to address.

2.3. Definitions and Concepts of Distributed Leadership

2. 3.1. Definitions of Distributed leadership

There are many definitions of distributed leadership from different scholars but there is no fixed and specific definition of it. For example, Bennett et al. (2003, p. 2) recommends considering distributed leadership as a "way of thinking about leadership" instead of as a practice or technique. Gronn (2000, p. 226) defines distributed leadership as "an emergent property of a group or a network of interacting individuals". In this sense, Harris and Lambert (2003) conceptualizes the scope of distributed leadership as involving many people rather than the few. Spillane (2012, p. 12) underlines this by defining distributed leadership as "practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals". The function of leadership within this definition is extended to multiple formal/informal leaders and interactions between them (Spillane et al., 2004). ESHA (2013, p. 16-17) emphasizes the environmental aspect of distributed leadership is:

> About leadership activities and decision making exceeding the formal positions. It is expressed in cooperation, sharing expertise and knowledge, initiating, responsibility and accountability… Distributed leadership is an environment where everyone feels free to develop, initiate and share new ideas.

Distributed leadership is viewed by Copland (2003, p. 376) as:

> A set of functions or qualities shared across a much broader segment of the school community that encompasses teachers and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school. Such an approach imposes the need for school communities to create and sustain broadly distributed leadership, systems, processes and capacities.

Despite the abundance of definitions, it is challenging to examine the true meaning of *distributed leadership*. As Harris (2013) notes, the fluidity of the concept can bring misleading and competing interpretations; the term may mean different things to different persons. The conflicting and competing interpretations of the term are pointed out by many scholars (Harris, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2009b; MacBeath, J. 2009). One of the most common mistakes is to confuse *distributed leadership* with other similar leadership models. For example, Jones et al. (2011, p. 4) consider distributed leadership as:

> A form of shared leadership that is underpinned by a more collective and inclusive philosophy than traditional leadership theory that focuses on skills, traits and behaviors of individual leaders.

Firestone and Martinez (2009) conclude two ways of using the term-*distributed leadership.* One way is to utilize it as a synonym of democratic leadership and utilize it to empower teachers (Harris and Muijs, 2005). The other is to utilize it as an analytic approach to illustrate how leadership is distributed among leaders, informal leaders and their situations (Spillane et al., 2004). The difference between these two is that the latter has no normative meaning (Firestone and Martinez, 2009). Firestone and Martinez (2009) explain that the usage of the second is to primarily present different mechanisms of distributed leadership and its causes and effects, instead of proposing an advocacy for or against any kinds of distributed leadership.

The reason for the difficulty in defining distributed leadership is because leadership is considered as an activity instead of as a formal role (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland, 2014). In the absence of a universal definition to provide a contemporary framework for both conceptualized and applied research, Woods and Roberts (2015) propose a comprehensive conceptual definition of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership c*omprises a culture that:*

- Views leadership as emerging from ongoing flows of interactions across the organisation and its hierarchy, not simply the actions of the single leader or small leadership elite
- Values leadership contributions from across the organisation and its hierarchy
- Recognizes that this view of leadership can be deployed in order to improve organisational effectiveness

  -Accompanied by an institutional structure that
- Spreads leadership opportunities beyond formal senior roles to enable different sources of expertise and perspectives to influence the organisation's work, development and innovative changes
- Facilitates flexible, collaborative working relationships across traditional boundaries and hierarchies
- Tends towards the creation of flatter hierarchies (Woods and Woods, 2013, p. 4).

Woods and Roberts (2015) later point out that the values of learning that guide distributed leadership in practice should also be specified. By way of definition, Tian et al. (2016) offer two research paradigms. They were respectively defined as *descriptive-analytical paradigm* and *prescriptive-normative paradigm*. Tian et al. explain that descriptive analytical paradigm arises from literature attempting to interpret and understand concepts of distributed leadership, whereas prescriptive-normative paradigm seeks to provide prescription for organisational operations and practically utilize distributed leadership in leadership practices. The first one is more likely to be theoretical whereas the second is more likely to be practical. Instead of focusing on whether leadership should be distributed, research in the descriptive-analytical paradigm assumes leadership has already

been distributed (Gronn, 2003a; Spillane, 2012). Tian et al. (2016, p. 149) wrote,

> By presupposing that distributed leadership was a phenomenon that naturally existed in schools, these studies aimed at dissecting the components and processes of leadership practice in order to expand and deepen the understanding of leadership work (Gronn, 2003a, Spillane, 2012, Spillane et al., 2004).

Research in this paradigm emphasizes identifying the variety of interactions in leadership practice and considers leadership as a dynamic attribute coming with interactions (Tian et al., 2016). Being more prevalent over the last ten years, studies in the prescriptive-normative paradigm examine distributed leadership from a utilitarian perspective, for example practices and its impacts (Tian et al., 2016). Instead of proposing that distributed leadership itself is a sustained and effective leadership model, research in this paradigm tends to explore those distributed leadership models that benefit organisational development (Camburn et al., 2003; Copland, 2003; Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2009). This study covers both paradigms, by interpreting the term, distributed leadership as well as its utilitarian function and its implication in a Chinese university.

2.3.2. The Main concepts of Distributed Leadership

Many scholars agree that there are three primary key concepts of distributed leadership (Bennett et al., 2003; Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2009; Edwards, 2014; Crawford, 2012). According to Bolden et al. (2009, p. 259),

> First, that leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals; second, that there is openness to boundaries of leadership (that is, who has a part to play both within and beyond the organisation); and third, that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few.

Summarizing the core elements of distributed leadership, Spillane (2012) and

Harris (2013, p. 12) wrote that distributed leadership "focuses upon the *interactions*, rather than the actions, of those in *formal and informal* leadership roles". Figure 2.1 Shows leadership practice from a distributed perspective, it can be noted that *leaders* and *followers, and interactions (situations)*are emphasized in this leadership model. They are prerequisites for leadership activities and lead researchers to shift from the unit to the web of these three elements when conducing leadership studies (NCSL, 2004).

Figure 2.1. Leadership practice from a distributed perspective (Spillane, 2012)

- Formal Leaders

The role of formal leaders within distributed leadership is to provide the precondition for a distributed leadership model to be implemented and developed (Harris, 2013). Formal leaders are not positioned as "an absolute authority, but more as a coordinator who utilized [utilises] others' expertise" (Gronn, 2008 cited in Tian et al., 2016, p. 150). According to Duif et al. (2013), the tasks and roles of formal leaders include showing initiative and making decisions, encouraging professionals to share resources and knowledge, acknowledging abilities, providing direction and guidance. These help professional staff with potentialities to better engage and get involved (Duif et al., 2003).

- Informal Leaders

The *broad-based involvement* which involves a large number of people is emphasized in leadership practice (Harris and Lambert 2003). The feature of

multiple-leaders of distributed leadership means those informal leaders even include the wider community, parents, students, professionals and teachers (Harris and Lambert 2003). As Van et al. (2009, p. 776) write, "it became obvious that different team members were responsible for conducting activities related to the wider organisational context, either because of their specific expertise or because of their particular informal networks". Instead of achieving success only through leaders in formal roles and positions, distributed leadership encourages the use of expertise without allowing everyone to be responsible for everything (Harris 2004, Spillane, 2012). This means everyone has the potential to lead (Harris, 2014; ESHA, 2013). Harion and Goh (2015) argue that existence of symmetrical power of each individual in the organisation are equal to the influence exerted on others regardless of hierarchy corresponds with both Asian and Western contexts. However, in the Asian settings such as China, staff members may choose not to take on potential leadership responsibilities because of the respect for hierarchy, even though they have the same opportunities to exert power (Harion and Goh 2015). Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable leadership, Duif et al. (2013) propose that staff members should contribute by initiatively participating and taking their responsibilities.

- Interactions

Spillane et al. (2004) point out the importance of inter-relationships and social context in leadership activities. It is just the tip of the iceberg to include not only formal leaders but also potential leaders; interactions and leadership practices rather than actions and positions are illustrated (Spillane, 2012). According to Harris (2008, p. 173), "leadership is not the preserve of the individual, but is a fluid or emergent property rather than a fixed phenomenon". The central notion of distributed leadership is that leadership practice is constituted through the interactions at various times; leadership is considered as a dynamic organisation rather than beliefs and actions of a leadership (Harris, 2013).

- Its position and relations

Bolden et al. (2009, p. 258) point out the function of distributed leadership,

> Its main value is as an analytic framework, drawing attention to the wider contextual dimensions of leadership, and as a rhetorical device, offering a way of reframing university leadership that is a potential successor to the traditional tension between 'managerialism' and 'collegiality'.

Instead of being as a replacement of the previous traditional leadership model, distributed leadership should be viewed as a *complement* (Pearce, 2004). It is of note that the traditional vertical leadership is highly related to the success of distributed leadership (Pearce, 2004), as it provides a basis to understand leadership from the perspective of distributed leadership and its notions are adopted to conduct ongoing empirical studies (Bolden et al., 2009).

Distributed leadership is positioned with informal and lateral leadership and used to be considered as an opposite leadership style of formal, hierarchical and vertical leadership practices (Harris, 2013). However, this juxtaposition is against both Harris (2013) and Spillane (2012). There are two relationship sets within the collaborative enterprises, the vertical (i.e. between formal leaders and informal leaders) and the horizontal (i.e. among subordinates) (Harris, 2009), and Harris (2013, p. 35) points out that there is a "powerful relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes". The primary attention that is paid to formal leadership patterns instead of informal leadership activities causes the neglect of the existence of both vertical and lateral patterns of practice. According to Harris (2013), high-performing organisations are those organisations that have flexibility and differentiation in vertical and horizontal leadership.

Woods and Gronn (2009) conclude that distributed leadership is actually in heterarchical relations. According to Woods and Gronn (2009, p. 440),

> Heterarchical relations mean that the units in relationship with one another are not arranged vertically and linearly, and (unlike a hierarchy) are undifferentiated by status. Heterarchical relations are random, unstructured and

fluid. In this sense, a heterarchical division of labor co-exists with a hierarchical division of rights and authority. Heterarchical relations also point us in the direction of holism and emergent structuring (or structuration) processes.

2.4.3. The Differences between Distributed Leadership with other Leadership Models

The idea of distributed leadership is often mentioned or substantially confused with other leadership concepts such as dispersed leadership, shared leadership, collaborative leadership, democratic leadership and teacher leadership (Harris, 2013; Edwards, 2014; Gunter et al., 2013).

- Distributed Leadership and Dispersed Leadership

Delegation is often confused with distributed leadership although Gosling et al. (2009, p. 10) claim, "…conscious attempts to disperse leadership across the workshop by its formal leader should not be confused with distributed leadership". Bolden et al. (2009) explain that delegation is a top-down dynamic. Dispersed leadership sometimes is regarded as a synonym of delegation (NCSL, 2004). However, in dispersed leadership, activities happen at various points whereas in delegation, there is an intentional exercise of power (NCSL, 2004). Green (2002, cited in NCSL, 2004, p. 14) defines the term, dispersed leadership as "leaderful community in which people believe they have a contribution to make, can exercise their initiative and can, when relevant to the task in hand, have followers".

- Distributed Leadership and Shared Leadership

Distributed leadership overlaps with shared leadership and was sometimes confused with this term in the past (Harris, 2013). However, it is different and is literally more than just shared leadership (Spillane, 2012). According to Jones et al. (2014, p. 604), shared leadership "identifies leadership as occurring laterally within sub-organisational units in which different leaders emerge as time and circumstances change". Shared leadership considers leadership as a social process

that originates from relationship, rather than behaviors of leaders (Doyle and Smith, 2001). Macbeath (2003, p. 6) argues that shared leadership does not focus on competencies or qualities but emphasizes, "between people, within groups, in collective action, which defies attempts to single out 'a leader'". Shared leadership is based on 'networking', 'partnering', and 'alliance' (NCSL, 2004). Instead of following the decisions top-down through the hierarchy, it gives chances for each individual to work on their own ideas. Shared leadership is based on appreciation, respect, concern, trust and openness (NCSL, 2004).

Distributed leadership can be viewed as part of a wider consideration of shared leadership (Crawford, 2012), but goes beyond shared leadership as it not only includes *the leadership-plus approach* but also focuses on leadership practice (Tian et al., 2015). Shared leadership emphasizes agencies constituted by many individual members whereas distributed leadership emphasizes *practice* rather than people (Harris, 2007). The comparison between shared and distributed leadership is concluded by Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala (2013) that shared leadership emphasizes micro-level groups, whereas distributed leadership focuses more on the macroscopic groups.

- Distributed Leadership and Collaborative Leadership

The different attribute of collaborative leadership is that its application reaches beyond the school level (NCSL, 2004). Frost and Harris (2003) claim that collaboration is an important approach to build the trust between school and the world. According to NCSL (2004, p. 14), "networked learning communities are an expression of collaboration across the boundaries of individual institutions". NCSL goes on to state that collaborative leadership can also be applied into the inter-agency background, presented through working altogether with teacher groups, parents, community agencies and other stakeholders while stakeholders of distributed leadership are mainly limited to those within an organisation.

- Distributed Leadership and Democratic Leadership

Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise (2004) argue that distributed leadership is viewed as a different leadership model to democratic leadership, as the latter has more values of a philosophical base. According to NCSL (2004, p. 15), antithetical to delegation and hierarchy, Elsbernd shows democratic leadership has four main characteristics, "a) a leader's interaction with, and encouragement of others to participate fully in all aspects of leadership tasks, b) widespread sharing of information and power, c) enhancing self-worth of others and d) energizing others for tasks". Within democratic leadership, leaders can either take their own decision after consulting other members or make decisions collaboratively with other group members (Vroom and Yetton, 1973). Woods (2004) argues that democratic leadership is more related to moral issues from the perspectives of sociology, political science and philosophy. Woods writes that schools with a democratic leadership model are viewed as places for the "inclusive development of opportunities with rights to meaningful participation and respect for and expectations toward everyone as an ethical being" (p. 4).

The conceptualization of distributed leadership is much narrower as practices can be controlled and defined with goals and proposes of contributing to the organisation development without references to citizenship and rights (Woods, 2004). Distributed leadership can be autocratic or democratic (Spillane, 2012; Woods, 2004). Tian et al. (2015) argue that democratic leadership includes individual growths and also participation in decision-making, and therefore, is more normative than distributed leadership. Hartley (2007, p. 205) further explains that distributed leadership "runs counter to the democratic requirement for logical and empirical critique". Instead of transformational and radical change, distributed leadership studies are exclusively positioned into a subjectivist, interpretivist paradigm aiming for a pragmatically social regulation (Hartley 2010). That is, distributed leadership may exhibit or promote democratic values but not necessarily lead to democratic leadership (Woods, 2004, Woods and Roberts, 2016).

- Distributed Leadership and Teacher Leadership

Democratic leadership is for teachers considered as leaders, whereas teacher leadership is distributed, giving teachers the chances to take responsibilities (NCSL, 2004). According to Frost and Harris (2003, p. 174), teacher leadership "is not just a matter of delegation, direction or distribution of responsibility, but rather a matter of teachers' agency and choice in initiating and sustaining change whatever their status". It refers to the degree that teachers are engaging with others including both leaders and informal leaders to promote teaching and learning (NCSL, 2004).

Drawing parallels with distributed leadership, Edwards (2014, p. 169) wrote:

> Distributed leadership theory advocates the decentralization of 'the leader' whilst understanding leadership as a more 'fluent and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon' (Gronn, 2000, p. 317 cited in Harris, 2007). Teacher leadership arguably goes some way to explaining how that leadership 'phenomenon' may emerge within an organisation.

Teacher leadership does have some overlaps with distributed leadership but is conceptually narrower as it only focuses on teaching staff in leadership. However, it also means teacher leadership can be simultaneously broader than some of the distributed leadership studies which are concerned exclusively with formal leadership roles in practical operationalization (Mujis and Harris, 2007). Edwards (2014) argues that one of the concerns of teacher leadership is that its concentration on the individual (teacher leader) is contradictory to the approach of distributed leadership. Tian et al. (2016, p. 151) further explain that, teacher leadership "might be expected to adopt a people-centred perspective by studying teachers' or teams' roles and functions" while distributed leadership focuses on interactions between different roles.

Although they have differences, there is a common feature of these leadership models; NCSL (2004) points out that they all advocate that leadership is not concerned exclusively with only one person and pay attention to abilities of other members within organisations. The best approach to understand these leadership

models, according to Bennett et al. (2003) and NCSL (2004) is to consider them as some new ways of thinking about leadership, and as some other practices or techniques of leadership with the idea of releasing and loosing powers and controls, even though "the relinquishing of control and authority is not absolute, but within 'limits'" (Hairon and Goh 2015, p. 710).

2.4. Distributed Leadership in General

2.4.1. The Leadership-plus and the Leadership Practice Aspects

According to Spillane (2012), distributed leadership can be understood from two perspectives, *leadership-plus* and *the leadership practice*. With respect to the Leadership-plus aspect, the pattern focuses not on the contribution of formal leaders but on the function of multiple leaders. Heller and Firestone (1995) were the first to identify that individuals in informal positions were also taking leadership responsibilities in schools. This is also suggested by studies carried out in Australian (Crowther et al., 2002), Canadian and American schools (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004). Spillane et al. (2009) suggests that school staff in different positions take leadership responsibilities; those staff include professional staff, mentor teachers, specialists in a range of subjects, assistant principals and principals. There are even multiple leaders in formal leadership positions. A study of 100 American elementary schools indicates that there are three to seven formal leadership positions that are involved with leadership distribution in each elementary school (Camburn et al., 2003). In this sense, formal leaders and individuals in informal leadership positions, such as professionals, teachers are all able to take leadership responsibilities (Spillane, 2012).

With respect to leadership practice aspect, Leithwood et al. (2009b, p. 5) note, "this pattern captures instances in which members' individual contributions add up to more than the sum of their parts through the interdependent nature of relationships among them". However, this does not mean that everyone in the

organisation leads as leadership practice depends on a range of situations (Spillane, 2012). Spillane explains that distributed leadership in practice varies with the developmental process of an institution, the school size, the school type, the subject and the leadership routine (It is noted that, the emphasis on the significance of context is also applicable with Higher Education institutions although this statement is based upon school contexts). Therefore, besides functions and roles, the importance of the interactions between leaders, follower*s* and situations are the main theme of the leadership practice aspect (Spillane, 2012). This leads to the combination of *leadership-plus* and *the leadership practice* when understanding distributed leadership.

2.4.2. The Mechanisms of Distributed Leadership

Some commentators argue that instead of emphasizing that leadership *is* distributed, the main focus of distributed leadership is *how* leadership is distributed (Spillane 2012; Spillane and Diamond, 2007; Harris, 2013). By utilizing case studies within eleven English schools at different levels and in different regions, NCSL (2004) carried out a one-year study aiming to identify the implications of distributed leadership. From the results of 302 questionnaires, NCSL summarized six mechanisms for distributing leadership which were formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, strategic distribution, incremental distribution, opportunistic distribution and cultural distribution.

Formal distribution means that leadership is distributed through designed job and role**s** descriptions (NCSL, 2004). The leading features of this model are formal job descriptions and pre-regulated roles; responsibilities will be allocated where necessary (ESHA, 2013). Within formal distribution, the principal of the organisation delegates leadership responsibilities; the organisation structures and leadership roles are already formally designated. Within formal distribution, the boundaries of accountabilities and responsibilities are obvious (MacBeath, 2009). Distributed leadership by this mechanism is understood as "allocating responsibility and encouraging a sense of ownership while at the same [time] an agency constrained within the remit and boundaries of one's designated role" (p.

45). Two key words within the meaning of distribution, *ownership* and *empowerment*, originated from this model. This model is beneficial for formal leaders to lend security and help others to clearly know their positions within the organisation. Parents and students can also feel easier to understand whom they should turn to and communicate with. As a significant precondition for the leadership development process that an organisation might commence with, NCSL (2004) claims that formal distribution "seems to be the key to an experience that meets the expectations of all groups of stakeholders" (p. 37).

Pragmatic distribution refers to leadership distribution through "often/necessary ad hoc delegation of workload" (NCSL, 2004, p. 35). It occurs when organisations are faced with external situations, and leaders may delegate responsibilities depending on the requirements from stakeholders (MacBeath, 2009). Within a demanding situation, it is pragmatic for leaders to do a cost-benefit analysis to choose the *right* person, who is judged as displaying knowledge and ability to finish the tasks and handle these temporary situations (MacBeath, 2009). In an environment with high stakes and pressures, the aims are to ensure safety and avoid courting failures by inexperienced staff. The difference between pragmatic distribution and other forms is its temporary and immediate feature, "not necessarily with a longer-term view to succession or building capacity" (p. 47). Gronn (2003b) names this model as spontaneous collaboration as these often transient and impromptu collaborations will automatically disband once the challenges or *crises* are addressed (Spillane, 2012). However, the possible barrier of this model may be the staff's unwillingness of being given leadership responsibilities as it is in tension with their identity as a teacher (Macbeath, 2009).

Strategic distribution is characterized by a long-term goal for organisational improvement (NCSL, 2004). Contrasted with pragmatic distribution which is about problem solving (Duif et al. 2013), strategic distribution is goal oriented and "based on the planned appointment of individuals to contribute positively to the development of leadership throughout the school" (NCSL, 2004, p. 35). One of the issues of concern in an organisation is the consequence of losing expertise

when those individuals leave their positions as this may harm the culture and sustainability of the organisation. “Distribution assumes strategic importance because when expertise becomes concentrated rather than distributed, it weakens the school” (p. 39).

According to the study of MacBeath (2009, p. 49), the distribution process in leadership is “initially from top-down through delegation and as it progresses it becomes both bottom-up and top-down”. Considering the delegation process, the above leadership models can be categorized into top-down approaches, while the following distribution approaches are mixed with more complex processes (NCSL, 2004). Incremental distribution refers to leadership distribution that distributes greater responsibilities to those individuals who display high leadership ability and capacity. Instead of recruitment, incremental distribution is about professional development (MacBeath, 2009). It is strategic but with a “pragmatic ad hoc quality” aiming at growing individuals’ ability and capacity (NCSL, 2004, p. 13). Strategic distribution means that “talented individuals create great organisations” (Michaels et al., 2002, p. 28) while incremental distribution means that “great organisations create talented individuals” (Gladwell, 2002, p. 28). Within incremental distribution, leaders are willing to give more of the leadership responsibilities when they ensure and acknowledge the authority of himself/herself and others (NCSL, 2004). By letting go of more of the responsibilities to competent individuals, staff are offered a platform to prove their ability and hence will have more chances to lead (ESHA, 2013). This positive cycle is suggested by NCSL (2004, p. 13), “when there is mutual confidence and a flow of innovative ideas, leadership becomes fluid”.

When looking at leadership from top-down to bottom-up, the leadership focus also changes from leaders to staff (NCSL, 2004). Leadership becomes dispersed rather than distributed, “taken rather than given, assumed rather than conferred, opportunistic rather than planned” (p. 41). Opportunistic distribution is that those teachers that are with high capabilities have a willingness and the initiatives to take more responsibilities and roles. This taxonomy of the word *opportunistic* means giving opportunities to teachers and students who grasp the opportunities;

the role of formal leaders is to be supportive (MacBeath, 2009). NCSL explains that, both leader willingness and staff motivation have to be simultaneous. Within this taxonomy, leaders create the structures through an invisible climate which staff can feel it. The issue of concern in this distribution style is the extent of subversion, which is uncontrollable and can be both positive and negative. Therefore, a precondition of opportunistic distribution, is a shared purpose, direction and values (MacBeath, 2009, NCSL, 2004).

Last but not least, within the taxonomy of cultural distribution, leadership is practiced as a tradition, ethos and culture (NCSL, 2004). Distinctive by comprehensively focusing on *what* instead of *who*, cultural distribution pays attention to people working as a community with same goals and challenges. Leadership activities rather than roles or initiatives are emphasized (ESHA, 2013, NCSL, 2004). Culture in this mechanism means looking after others, team working, cultivating practices and ideas, grafting and seeding (NCSL, 2004). MacBeath (2009, p. 52) claims its spontaneous, organic and intuitive virtue is that "distribution as a conscious process is no longer applicable because people exercise initiative spontaneously and collaboratively and there is no clear demarcation between leaders and followers".

It is noted that leadership within an organisation does not 'fit neatly into' a certain mechanism, although leadership is generally considered as developing from formal distribution to cultural distribution (MacBeath, 2009). Cultural distribution is the most advanced of the taxonomies; however, formal structure is also necessary to help in distributing leadership (Duif et al., 2013). Then again, formal structure can also be an obstacle for leadership distribution when it hinders sharing responsibilities and decision-making (Duif et al., 2003). It can be argued again that leadership is influenced by contexts and should be analyzed as a situational process (MacBeath, 2009). As Day et al. (2009) highlight, the extent of distributed leadership is not only influenced by the aptitude, ability and characteristics of leaders, but actually an "equation of several variables" (Day et al., 2009 cited in Reval and Schnellbach, 2013, p. 25). These factors include personal background and characteristics of leaders, cultural and historical factors

such as organisational history, retention and recruitment and external pressures (e.g. policies and strength from national, regionally and local perspectives) (NCSL, 2004). It takes time to cultivate the climate, relying on what developmental stage the group is at, the professional background and attributes of the staff and other contextual variables (Reval and Schnellbach, 2013). When considering the most effective approach, NCSL (2004, p. 35) concludes:

> While these are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive and while each may be appropriate at a given time and in a given context, the most successful leadership would, we believe, convey an understanding of all of these different expressions of 'distribution' and be able to operate in each way as appropriate to the task in hand.

2.4.3. Power in Distributed Leadership

Hatcher (2005) notes that leadership distribution does not mean that power is also 'distributed'. With respect to the ways to distribute power, there are mainly two forms. One is that "someone distributes the power to act", emphasizing that leaders play an important role in shaping and creating distributed leadership (Lumby, 2013, p. 585). Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz and Louis (2009) conducted a longitudinal case study research in six American schools. Informants include representatives of teacher union, administrators, teachers and (assistant) principals. By interviewing 20 respondents at each school, Murphy et al. wrote that it is the principal that controls and authorizes teacher leaders. "If distributed leadership is to blossom, principals need to be assertive in reshaping structures in the service of developing a deeper pool of leadership" (p. 186). Within this form, the intention and motivation of leaders are emphasized. The second power is "community volition" (Lumby, 2013, p. 585), which illustrates the spontaneous and fluid emergence of distribution in the leadership practice. It is not caused by any planned and individual intention while this notion of power itself will bring positive and negative influences on each individual within the organisation.

Lumby (2013, p. 586) notes, "leadership that emerges spontaneously, related to individual capacity and contingent on the challenge in hand, is parallel to or shaped by the episodic agency of the head teacher or vice-chancellor". Scholars reveal that both of these two powers operate in tension with each other (Harris, 2008; Bolden et al., 2009). Within the *episodic agency,* leaders facilitate and initiate distributed leadership and staff are "shaped by leader's one-dimensional power". In contrast, the second form enables staff to empower leaders. Lumby considers power as a commodity, which flows in different directions but with no absolute, as it will be strengthened in practice or hindered by barriers. Those barriers may come from other authorities such as district, local authority and government, or legal constraint and even the professional community. This notion of power is consistent with the idea of top-down and bottom-up approach*es*, and designed organisation and lived organisation concepts.

2.4.4. Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches

Top-down approaches occur when the leaders have the intention to distribute and share leadership responsibilities with other members (Harris and Chapman, 2002, Zepke, 2007). Bennett et al. (2003) reveal that many studies suggest top-down approaches can be the beginning of distributed leadership. At that point, leaders in the formal position play significant roles in establishing organisational culture and leadership models (ESHA, 2013). Leaders may find teachers having no willingness to take leadership responsibilities beyond their teaching (NCSL, 2004). Therefore, formal leaders need to value and encourage staff members, give direction and guidance, know when to step back and provide opportunities, time and space for staff member to involve into decision-making and make contribution (ESHA, 2013). As ESHA (2013, p. 12) states:

> A 'top-down' initiative may acknowledge and incorporate the existing informal power of leadership relationships into more formal leadership structures in ways seen as appropriate by the senior staff who are creating the distributive structure or culture.

Bottom-up approach occurs when a range of professionals collaboratively and democratically work together as a community (Zepke, 2007, Kärkkäinen, 2000). The initiative is likely to come from the bottom when a group or certain individuals are considered as having potential for leadership roles or when there is no strong leadership within the organisation (Bennett et al., 2003). As such, the emphasis of leadership roles shifts from a formal leader's behaviors to the actions of informal individuals (NCSL, 2004) Opportunistic and cultural distribution can be categorized as bottom-up approaches (NCSL, 2004). Considering the developmental process of mechanisms, it is likely that as they usually evolve from top-down approaches, bottom-up approaches can be viewed to be more advanced in distributed leadership. An organisation with a bottom-up approach provides a climate for each staff member to display their capacities (NCSL, 2004). As Bolden et al. (2009, p. 271) explain:

> Leadership from this perspective, does not adhere to clear lines of hierarchy command, but emerges from the interplay between collective engagement and individual agency—from this perspective everyone has a part to play in the leadership of the institution whether formally recognized or not.

2.4.5. Designed Organisation and Lived Organisation

According to Spillane (2012), understanding leadership from the perspective of distributed leadership leads to the identification of both formal structures and also the lived reality of an organisation. This is clarified as two levels of organisational entities, which Spillane and Camburn (2006) call designed organisation and lived organisation. The designed organisation is about the formal structure of an organisation reflected in committee structures (e.g. communist party committee in China, leadership team), organisation routines such as regular meetings, formal roles (e.g. mentors, administrators, dean, assistant head, head) etc.. Research into designed organisation within a school context has suggested that the leadership and management responsibilities are distributed across a range of leaders including heads, assistant heads, professionals, teachers, mentors etc. (Spillane et al., 2009). However, the

exclusive understanding based upon formal reports and designations has two limitations. As Spillane and Camburn (2006) note, firstly, individuals in formal positions may not get involved in leading and managing work, although they are in the leadership position. Secondly, emphasis on designed organisation is more likely to ignore the roles of informal leaders. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to leadership in practice.

Lived organization refers to the practical issues happening in daily operations (Spillane and Camburn, 2006). Designed organisations reflect the intentions and values of leaders, whereas a lived organisation reflects those of staff. For example, Harris (2013) indicates that in a designed organisation, the leader's perception of distribution may not be shared by staff. The designed and lived perceptions of organization in this circumstance become ambivalent. It is critical to understand leadership from this taxonomy, as they are not mirrors to each other although they are mutually relevant; therefore, a designed organisation is not guaranteed to be a lived organisation (Spillane and Camburn, 2006). Likewise, Spillane and Camburn (2006, p. 8) go on to illustrate:

> While the lived organisation gets up close with the practice of leading and managing, the designed organisation is also critical because aspects of the designed organisation, such as organisational routines and formally designed positions, frame leadership practice and shape it in particular ways.

Despite the tension, this taxonomy is still helpful for scholars and pioneers to understand organisational leadership or when designing a new leadership structure. As Spillane (2012) points out careful diagnosis and identification of the practical process before creating and designing a new structure is essential - "design without diagnosis is a recipe for disaster" (p. 97).

2.4.6. Collaborative, Collective and Coordinative Distribution

According to Spillane (2012), there are three main types of co-performance approach to distribution, collaborative distribution, collective distribution and

coordinated distribution. Collaborated distribution refers to the leadership practice that has multiple leaders working together in the same routine, time and place (Spillane, 2012). Harris (2013) gives some examples including learning mentor conference, departmental planning session and a regular meeting. Within this model, more attention upon communication is required as there is "more heedful interrelating among leaders" (Spillane, 2012, p. 61). Collective distribution refers to leadership practice that has multiple leaders working interdependently and separately for a leadership routine (Spillane, 2012). Assessment for learning, as an example, is an interdependent school group activity, in which the support staff and teachers work in different ways (Harris, 2013). Examples also consist of a range of routines that the individuals are less likely to monitor and observe each other in action; for example, these include monitoring, teacher development, instructional evaluation and identification (Spillane, 2012). Coordinated distribution characterizes leadership practice that has multiple leadership activities and routines with a particular order and sequence. These include "sequentially arranged leadership tasks" that leaders work on together or separately such as a long-term assessment work within a school (Spillane, 2012, p. 66).

It is noted that a leadership routine may not fit neatly into only one type of distribution, which means these approaches to distribution are not exclusive to each other (Spillane, 2012). Thus, the same leadership routine can involve similar, different or even conflicting goals. In this sense, collective distribution and coordinated distribution are more likely for leaders to co-perform when working for different goals and directions, although within collaborated distribution, a leader may also strive for different or even opposite ends. Nevertheless, despite the possible differences in directions and ends, leaders are always heedful of the actions of each other during the process (Spillane, 2012).

Spillane and Camburn (2006) carried out a series of empirical studies to examine the mechanism of distributed leadership. Their research consisted of a five- year longitudinal study of 12 Chicago primary schools, and a leadership instruction study in twenty K-8 schools. By utilizing theoretical sampling strategy and

mixed methods, these researchers presented the co-performance process of leadership routines, using structured and semi-structured interviews, observations, social network surveys, leader logs and videotaping the leadership practice. They sought principals' perspectives on distributed leadership in school leadership and management and differences between designed and lived organisation. According to Spillane and Camburn (2006), the findings suggest that leadership responsibilities are distributed to multiple individuals in both designed and lived schools, in both formal positions and informal positions; however, the approach to distribution varies within schools. "The particular leadership and management activity is a key variable in accounting for the way in which work is distributed to individuals" (p. 20). Therefore, it is important to pay attention not only approaches to distribution but also context to understand leadership practice (Spillane and Camburn, 2006). This study, again, emphasizes the significance of a context specific viewpoint.

2.4.7. Seven Dimensions of Distributed Leadership

Several commentators have reviewed a range of aspects that necessitate effective leadership functions of distributed leadership within an organisation (Day et al., 2009, Lambert, 2003, NCSL, 2004). Day et al. (2009) point out several important elements such as working collaboratively, high expectations, clear planning of roles, co-ordination, trust and shared values and goals. Lambert (2003, p. 425) also illustrates some of them as follow:

> Broad based, skillful participation; shared vision that bring coherence; inquiry based use of information to inform decisions and practice; roles and responsibilities that are collaborative and lead to collective responsibility…

The empirical study by NCSL (2004) has not only presented the six mechanisms of distributed leadership, but also discovered several promoting factors that help distributed leadership function. According to NCSL (2004), trust and resources are considered as a precondition of distribution and change; shared goals are coupled with compromise, consensus and conflict. Together with the above

elements, self-esteem, human resources, stability and continuity, good staffing are also claimed as significant promoting factors. However, as only small part of the findings, the factors mentioned and pointed out by NCSL (2004) are disorganised and not systematically summarized as a framework. ESHA (2013) developed upon these findings and structured their findings into a framework.

ESHA (2013) conducted a large-scale study aiming to examine the extent of distributed leadership in European schools and which factors influence this. By analyzing questionnaires from more than 1000 respondents in eight European counties, the researchers found that distribution did occur within schools of those countries but to varying degrees. While including personal and school related features, it should be noted that this study carried out in eight different countries failed to consider the historical and cultural influences of country, region and organisation. The findings of perceived variables summarized in this way, are more likely to cause bias. Moreover, the results of this study may not be a great reference for studies conducted in the Higher Education context as only 3% of the respondents within this study were working in Higher Education (ESHA, 2013). Nevertheless, the seven dimensions of distributed leadership can still be a helpful guidance for distributed leadership studies.

The following are the seven dimensions pointed out by ESHA (2013) and summarized by Lu (2014) to understand leadership from the distributed perspective. It covers:

- School structure: the agreed formal organisational structure that supports the distribution of responsibilities" (Lu, 2014, p. 30);
- Strategic vision: a shared vision with common values for all;
- Values and beliefs: mutual respect, confidence and high expectations
- Collaboration and cooperation: staff work collaboratively in order to improve school results;
- Decision-making: everyone is involved with decisions about the school's ambitions and expectations;
- Responsibility and accountability: staff feel responsible for their

performances, tasks and works;

- Initiative: staff contribute their own ideas and come up with initiatives (ESHA, 2013, p. 17).

This taxonomy can be a guideline for distributed leadership studies in various contexts although some of the dimensions can be understood and applied differently when doing distributed leadership analysis in another culture. Taking responsibility and accountability as an example, Hairon and Goh (2015, p. 709) write, "the Asian culture of hierarchy in the workplace may not encourage shared accountability among co-leaders. Hence, accountability rests primarily on one school leader regardless whether decisions are distributed or not". Therefore, it is possible that leaders in the Asian context prefer the model of distributed leadership to be adopted whilst keeping their authority, power and also their accountability. Also, as for decision-making, it can be said that there is no limitless and unfettered decision-making power, although staff members are encouraged to take part (Hairon and Goh, 2015). Leaders still have the top priority. "This truism may hold true in both western egalitarian and Asian hierarchical organisations, with the latter possibly being more restrictive and bounded than the former" (p. 708).

2.5. The Advantages of Distributed Leadership

2.5.1. Organisational Improvement

The positive influences that distributed leadership may bring have attracted a considerable amount of empirical attention; there is an abundant body of research which reveals that distributed leadership can make contributions to organisational improvement (Bolden et al., 2009; Harris, 2004 and 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006, 2007 and 2009a). Bolden et al. (2009, p.266) summarize that the benefits of distributed leadership to a Higher Education organisation include:

> Improved responsiveness to students, staff, funding agencies, greater transparency of finances, managerial convenience through the distribution of managerial workloads, and improved teamwork and communication between academic and non-academic staff.

Obadara (2013) carried out a descriptive study in 2010 aiming to explore the link between distributed leadership and school improvement and sustainability. It reveals that distributed leadership has a strong relationship between learning and teaching, instructional design, professional development of teachers, school achievement and school culture (Obadara, 2013). Woods and Gronn (2009) claim that distributed leadership can also help improve the working environment and self-governance. A study by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England adopted semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis within ten case schools and found the evidence of "upward organisational improvement trajectory" can be traced through Ofsted data, self-evaluation and performance data (quote in Harris, 2004, p. 17).

Hallinger and Heck (1996) point out that most studies ignored the *forms* of distributed leadership that sustain the school improvement; and also, the research focus of some studies regarding this area were only upon formal leadership which may cause research bias. The subsequent study of Leithwood et al. (2007) indicates that the extent of benefits that distributed leadership brings for organisational development depends upon the pattern of distributed leadership. As Van et al. (2009) wrote increased performance of an organisation occurs only when all in a group consider themselves as leaders. Based upon the above statements, Harris (2014, p. 5) further proposes "*under the right conditions*, distributed leadership can be a strategy for securing and sustaining better organisational outcomes".

The National Association of Head-teachers (NAHT) (1999) conducted a study in twelve case schools aiming to explore what forms of leadership can improve school development (Harris, 2004). By interviewing a range of participants including parents, pupils, teachers, governors, senior managers and head teachers

in each school, the researchers found that successful leadership is distributed through joint and collaborative working. According to Harris (2004, p. 16):

> The evidence showed that these successful heads led both the cognitive and the effective lives of the school, combining structural (developing clear goals), political (building alliances) and educational leadership (professional development and teaching improvement) with symbolic leadership principles (presence, inspiration) and distributed leadership practice (empowering others to lead).

It is acknowledged that the research findings are mainly from head-teacher's point of view, whereas the interactions and situations of individual members in different levels of positions are ignored. Also, the small sample has hindered generalization. However, the study does affirm that certain forms of distributed leadership are beneficial to organisational improvement.

2.5.2. Higher Efficacy of Teachers

As Day et al. (2009) note, distributed leadership is not only practically helpful for leaders to divide workload, but is also beneficial to improve the self-efficacy of other staff members such as teachers. Snell and Swanson (2000) suggest that those teachers who view themselves as leaders have higher levels of subject and pedagogical knowledge and stronger capacity to work with others, empower and reflect. The qualitative study in forty-six Belgian secondary schools conducted by Hulpia, Devos and Van Keer (2009) also show that distributed leadership will increase a teacher's commitment to a school. Katzenmeyr and Moller (2001) explain that teachers who emerge as leaders may have higher work satisfaction and self-esteem which could improve performance. These above motivation, in turn, can also have a positive impact on leaders (i.e. higher level of performance) (Katzenmeyr and Moller, 2001). As such, facilitating distributed leadership networking can be achieved through building a culture of collaboration and encouraging staff to show their leadership capacity (Duif et al., 2013). As ESHA (2013, p.15) explains:

> Participating school leaders provided an infrastructure where it was safe to try things out, to innovate with new ways of working. Staff responded to this opportunity positively. It has affected the way they saw themselves as professionals and improved their sense of self-efficacy. This, in turn, had a positive impact on the way they interacted with pupils and other staff members in the schools.

2.5.3. Student Learning Outcomes and Performance

The link between distributed leadership and student performance has been heatedly debated over the last ten years (Tian et al., 2015). Several commentators identified this link even in the early literature on the subject (Silins and Mulford, 2002; Harris and Mujis, 2004). As Bell, Bolam and Cubillo (2002) wrote, compared with top-down leadership, distributed leadership has a more positive impact upon student performance. Meanwhile, Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p. 12) also maintain that the impact of distributed leadership in student performance may be "small but educationally significant". However, it is the contention of Harris (2004, p. 21) in 2004 that, "despite a wealth of school improvement literature advocating more collaborative, democratic and distributed forms of leadership, clear links with improved student outcomes have yet to be established".

Tian et al. (2015) explain that the difficulty of figuring out whether distributed leadership enhances student learning outcomes is that a range of variables influence student performance. Anderson, Moore and Sun (2009) carried out a small-scale study in five British schools attempting to explore the relationship between these two. However, they failed to find a direct correlation as the fluctuation in test outcomes were attributed to various factors. Also, another reason is that most of the researchers explore more about the extent and effectiveness of leadership distribution and its effects on teachers, instead of the direct link between these two variables (Anderson et al., 2009, Edwards, 2014). According to Tian et al. (2015, p. 155), "Earlier studies had already proven that

teachers contributed the most to students' learning outcomes". It is much easier and more productive to explore distributed leadership with teachers' effectiveness rather than investigating measurable and direct relationship between distributed leadership and student performance (Anderson et al., 2009). This, in turn, adds the difficulty to make a clear conclusion.

However, there is an increasing amount of research showing the positive correlation between distributed leadership and student learning outcomes. Research into collaborative learning in 2006 indicated that the collaborative working between students has a positive impact on academic outcomes (ESHA, 2013). Day et al. (2007, p. 17) in 2007 found, "substantial leadership distribution was very important to a school's success in improving pupil outcomes". This is supported by Bowen and Bateson (2008, p. 5) who wrote, "in order to allow all children to reach their potential in terms of attainment and the wider Every children matters (ECM) agenda, leadership should be distributed throughout the school". As Harris (2013, p. 110) notes, "there is a perception that distributed leadership has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning which have in turn been converted into positive student learning outcome". The study carried out by Revai and Schnellbach (2013) also pointed out the strong link between these two variables.

In order to enrich the empirical work regarding distributed leadership and student outcomes, Timperley (2009) carried out research in four consecutive years in seven elementary New Zealand Schools. A minimum of three meetings of student literacy performance in each school were observed, and each year, teachers, principals and literacy leaders were also interviewed before or after the meeting. The finding indicates that effective leadership distribution can be achieved by forming teacher's expectations and visions for student achievement, breaking boundary by managers, and achieving coherence within organisations. According to Timperley (2009, p. 197), the study "presents a case for distributed leadership in particular ways that can have positive outcomes for students in a school improvement context in which varying success was evident". The only large-scale and longitudinal study conducted in 197 elementary schools in

America has also suggested that distributed leadership can "indirectly but significantly" (Heck and Hallinger, 2010, p. 881) promote student-learning outcomes (Tian et al., 2015).

2.6. The Barriers to and Limitations of Distributed Leadership

2.6.1. The Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Despite a range of benefits that distributed leadership brings for organisations, distributed leadership has its weaknesses. Within institutions, distributed leadership may create a lack of security, predictability and stability among members (Harris, 2013). Other disadvantages that have been mentioned include stress for staff, procrastination in decision-making, unrealistic expectations, and role confusion (Gosling, 2009). From the macro level, Harris (2004) argues that the current top-down leadership system is one of the barriers that prevents teachers in schools from taking on leadership responsibilities and achieving autonomy; a school with a conventional hierarchy system, which demarcates by pay scales and positions, is less likely to be responsive to distributed leadership. NCSL (2004) also mentions the organisational structure as one of the factors that inhibit the implementation and success of distributed leadership. Together with structural barriers, Harris (2004, p. 19) further adds it is the "*cultural* and *micro political* barriers operating in schools that make distributed forms of leadership difficult to implement".

Murphy (2005 cited in Leithwood et al., 2009a, p. 236) summarised three factors that may either facilitate or hinder distributed leadership, which are

- resources (including enough time for all aspects of preparing for and participating in leadership roles);
- incentives and recognition (including monetary and non-monetary rewards such as public acknowledgement of teacher-leaders' work); and

- role clarity (including an effort to avoid creating resentment among colleagues).

Distributed leadership takes time to implement and blossom. With respect to incentives, Harris (2004) points out that distributed leadership may cause extra financial costs and worries, as formal leaders may need financial incentives to motivate and remunerate staff members. As for role clarity, Leithwood et al. (2009a, p. 4 and 2009b, p.4) claim that distributed leadership may also be utilized by leaders as a "subtle strategy for inculcating among staff the values and goals of more powerful members". Ritchie and Woods (2007) explain that distributed leadership may increase the responsibilities and burdens of teachers, but at the same time, the power is not shared with those informal leaders. This situation may be more obvious in Asian hierarchical contexts. For example, Jiang (2011) demonstrates that in Taiwan, legislation has encouraged teachers to participate in leadership activities, while there is no legal protection for their rights and interests; this grey area appears to cause apathy among teachers as regards sharing or taking on additional responsibilities. In addition to this, Harris (2004) argues that distributed leadership may lead to "estrangement among teachers" (p. 21). It is not hard to imagine that the ambiguous border between responsibilities and powers may also cause conflictions and tensions of relationship. Teachers may be hostile to distributed leadership because of their insecurity and over-cautiousness (Harris, 2004).

In 2013, Harris (2013) further aruged that the barriers of distributed leadership depend upon whether distributed leadership is perceived as *a delegation* or as *an erosion of power*. Firstly, when staff members perceive leadership distribution as a delegation, they may be less willingness to take on those leadership responsibilities as they create tension with their identity as a teacher. As MacBeath (2005 cited in Leithwood et al., 2009a, p. 236) wrote:

> Good teachers are already busy and may be reluctant to take on new functions. They come to the job focused on working with their students rather than with other adults and may easily conclude that additional leadership responsibilities

will only erode the time they have for their students.

Together with the identity issue, the feeling of being put under significant pressure is the other reason for decreased willingness (NCSL, 2004). As NCSL argues, "when there's so much pressure on teachers in the school they will definitely avoid taking leadership responsibilities" (p. 37). In this regard, individuals in formal leadership positions may also feel reluctant to take over pivotal roles (Harris, 2013). Statistics in 2013 revealed that in the UK, 70 percent of middle leaders and 43 percent of deputies feel resistant to the idea of becoming a head teacher, as those middle leaders and deputies are best positioned to understand the demands and challenges of headship, and therefore are reluctant to consider taking on a headship for those reasons (Harris, 2013).

Secondly, when distributed leadership is perceived as an erosion of power, formal leaders may feel threatened and therefore prevent the implementation of distributed leadership (Harris, 2013, Leithwood et al., 2009a). NCSL (2004) suggests that some head teachers admit that they feel anxious and worried when other members become too independent, and this makes them think it necessary to take control and establish their authority. As Harris (2013, p. 49) further explains:

> Distributed leadership may be considered too threatening to those in formal power positions, not only in terms of ego and perceived authority, but also because it places leaders in a vulnerable position, as they have to relinquish direct control over certain activities.

2.6.2. Critiques of Distributed Leadership

There are also critiques regarding distributed leadership. Lakomski (2008, p. 161) states that, "even the most cursory scanning of literature on distributed leadership makes it pretty clear that there is a problem". For better understanding of what that problem is, the statements of various commentators are listed and analysed in this section. Maxcy and Nyugen (2006, p. 189) wrote:

> Whatever advance these frameworks offer in describing distributed leadership, they are conventional from an administrative standpoint in their lack of attention to the politics of how leadership is distributed, toward what ends, and to whose benefit or detriment. In doing so, they undermine an imperative for effective political voice through deliberative and democratic practices in more socially just schools.

Leithwood et al. (2009b) suggest that there is still a requirement for empirical evidence and conceptual clarity of the rationale for distributed leadership, because the model is prevalent without scientific basis. According to Gunter et al. (2013, p. 559), "this is regarded not just as an empirical necessity but to ensure the field has legitimacy". However, these statements have been labelled out of date and contested by an increasing number of empirical studies examining the mechanisms, benefits and detriments of distributed leadership (ESHA, 2014, Lu, 2015, etc.). Following are the main critiques of distributed leadership from both *conceptual* and *empirical* perspectives.

From the *theoretical* perspective, Crawford (2012, p. 614) acknowledges that the emphasis on *interactions between individuals* in distributed leadership concurrently leads to the ignorance of "*the organisational focus* in leadership and management studies" The "ideology of the 'can-do' culture" (Glatter, 2006, p. 73), which refers to the expertise-oriented element of distributed leadership, leads organisations to avoid or ignore discussion of organisational structures and believe that distributed leadership can help them overcome any difficulties. As Tian et al. (2016, p. 156) notes, "normative studies that evaluated distributed leadership via calculable indicators such as test scores might blind research from recognizing the deeper value of school leadership work". By employing both normative and descriptive approaches, this study pays attention to the *organisational focus* and other contextual aspects, achieved by inclusion of both *university* and *departmental* contexts, *geographical and regional* contexts, and the *historical* and *cultural* contexts of China.

It has been mentioned that the driving factor for leadership distribution is typically ability rather than position (Woods et al., 2009). However, this does not mean that positions are not important in distributed leadership, as distributed leadership has to "coexist with an organisation's formal accountability structure" (p. 446). Woods et al. explains that, "ideas and ingrained assumptions about whom to trust, who is legitimately able to influence decisions and so on, condition the possibilities for widening the boundaries of leadership" (p. 450). This points to the significant position of formal leaders. Distributed leadership is considered as a structure, while at the same time, it is the formal leaders rather than other staff members who are considered as the *agency* that operates an organisation. Leaders are still responsible for cultivating culture and make the ultimate decisions, regardless of the extent of leadership distribution. In this case, Woods (2004) points out that it is important for people in the position of accountability and power, such as head teachers, to truly understand distributed leadership.

Gronn (2009) illustrates that solo leaders still play the most significant role in distributed leadership, but this is not clarified in the general conversation of Gronn's discussion of distributed leadership as the policy makers "have found the large numbers viewpoint easier to sell to teachers" (Gronn, 2009 cited in Crawford, 2012, p. 616). Meanwhile, distributed leadership misleads people into forgetting that alternative leadership approaches may be at work at the same time. In order to achieve a holistic viewpoint of leadership and make leadership both theoretically and empirically useful, Gronn (2009), defines a new term, *hybrid leadership,* to replace the term, *distributed leadership*. According to Gunter et al. (2013, p. 567), features of formal leadership and distributed leadership are not exclusive but are instead mutual related. By combining hierarchy with distributed leadership (Woods, 2015), the hybrid approach enables "multiple facets of leadership operate alongside one another" (Edwards, 2014, p. 188). The function of hybrid leadership is highlighted by Tian et al. (2016):

> It detached distributed leadership from the individual-collective and formal-informal leadership continuums. The model admitted that individual

leaders were equally significant and simultaneously co-existed with collective forms of leadership. Additionally, because distributed leadership would evolve over time and differed from one context to the other, it had no fixed pattern.

Gronn's hybrid model enables researchers to understand the important role of both formal leaders and informal leaders, and the fusion of leadership practices in distributed leadership. This reflects the fact that although distributed leadership focuses on interactions and shared responsibilities, distributed leadership is not commonly contrasted with hierarchical leadership and other leadership practices when it comes to studies in this field.

In addition, distributed leadership studies are criticised as ignoring influence factors such as background, experience, age, gender, and race (Lumby, 2013). For example, gender is considered as a barrier to distributed leadership and is therefore not mentioned in these studies to avoid "provoking questions about *including a wider range of people* in leadership" (p. 583). Lumby (2013, p. 589) offers the critique that "even a brief consideration of literature on gender, race and diverse leadership team would expose the naivety of the distributed leadership claim". These dissenting statements are critical in two aspects. Firstly, Camburn (2003) has found in 2003 that there was no difference between the perception of males and females on the extent of distributed leadership. The study by ESHA (2013) also revealed that the gender issue implied by Lumby is a misconception. By analysing the relationship between influence factors (independent variables) and the distributed leadership scale (dependent variables), ESHA (2013) found that female respondents within the study have a positive correlation with distributed leadership. Therefore, it can be said that gender itself is less likely to be a barrier within distributed leadership. Secondly, with the gradual maturity of empirical studies, there have been increasing numbers of distributed leadership studies analysing influence factors including position, gender, seniority, organisational type and size, type of employment, school policy and even the impact of financial crisis (i.e. ESHA, 2013, Tashi, 2015, Jiang, 2011, Wang, Wang and Wang, 2011).

From the *practical* perspective, Johnson (2004) firstly criticises distributed leadership by considering it as a political strategy for a top-down system. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) subsequently criticise this political aspect by viewing distributed leadership as a new kind of managerialism. Hall et al. (2011 cited in Crawford, 2012, p. 617) wrote that distributed leadership in some instances may be viewed as a "smokescreen for the more authoritarian practices of head teachers that were developing as a response to pressure from policy makers". Crawford (2012) further claims that distributed leadership is utilised as rhetorical by the British government as rhetoric around sharing autonomy and power with schools but in reality it points to managerialism and centralisation. Tian et al. (2016) therefore stress that the mechanism of distributed leadership may be manipulated to serve the interests of a certain group of people. However, as Lumby (2013) suggests that there is no apolitical theory existing in education because the behaviours of both visible engagement and political ignorance are political acts.

Distributed leadership is also criticised as having problems of ethical foundation (Woods, 2004) and "democratic deficit" (Woods and Gronn, 2009, p. 430). Woods et al. (2004) highlights that distributed leadership may cause power disparities within an organisation, and it is less likely to justify such disparities. According to Lumby (2013, p. 592),

> Distributed leadership while originally introduced to educators as merely a lens the better to understand leadership, has grown into a theory and frequently prescribed practice which promotes a fantasy apolitical world in which more staff are supposedly empowered, have more control of their activity and have access to a wider range of possibilities.

However, the *prescribed practice* is just prescribed, and distributed leadership may be politically used as a mechanism to manipulate staff into taking on extra workload (Hatcher, 2005). Bolden et al. (2011) comment that distributed leadership may be used to encourage participation and engagement, but sources of power and resources may be imbalanced. Leaders are still holding the power

while the staff are doing more of the work. This links distributed leadership with problems of social equity and justice (Woods and Woods, 2013). In order to examine whether distributed leadership can advance democratic values and social equity, Woods and Roberts (2016) carried out a case study within an English secondary school which self-defined as having a culture of distributed leadership. They interviewed students, senior leaders, non-teaching staff and teaching staff to identify the link between distributed leadership and social justice. Based on the perception of respondents, the results show that:

> To develop distributed leadership that seeks to enhance social justice, it is necessary to recognize and address inequities and feelings of hurt and marginalization which we also found to be embedded in the day-to-day processes of dispersed leadership as perceived by participants. (Woods and Roberts, 2016, p. 153)

Within the study, they also recommend that future scholars research distributed leadership from three perspectives: institutional, cultural, and social. Although the findings are from a small-scale study, this tri-part approach can be a useful guide for studies with various contexts. For example, in respect of the institutional perspective, Woods and Roberts (2016, p. 153) question the relationship between institutional structure and the definition of distributed leadership. They offer this explanation:

> Formal authority may be hierarchical (i.e. relatively undistributed), yet in other ways flexibility, individual and group autonomy and cross-boundary working can be facilitated by institutional structures and the hierarchy may be more or less steep.

The above statement is relevant and consistent with this study which explores how distributed leadership can be achieved within a hierarchical context. Likewise, in terms of social perspective, Woods' approach helps the researcher raise awareness of political impact within leadership studies. Gunter et al. (2013) wrote that it is problematic to depoliticise distributed leadership as it influences

the conceptualisation of schools, and furthermore,

> policy context in which distributed leadership has been developed and popularized can be taken for granted where a technical problem solving approach acts as nothing more ‘than sticking plasters on wounds that need more extensive attention’(Bottery, 2004, p. 24)(Gunter et al., 2013, p. 569).

This may be consistent with Chinese Higher Education which is influenced by the political power of Chinese government.

It is noted that any leadership model including distributed leadership will not be a perfect leadership model that solves all problems. Scholars tend to consciously try to define distributed leadership as either a good or bad thing. However, it is not actually necessary to evaluate and standardise distributed leadership as its implementation, mechanism and effect depend on the aim and context of its use (Harris and Spillane, 2008, p. 33). The purpose of researching distributed leadership is to help practitioners and academics understand the knowledge of leadership practice as a systemic and integrated whole (Robinson, 2009). For example, Crawford (2012) states that the focus of distributed leadership studies has shifted from a one-dimensional aspect to wider aspects such as Woods’s institutional, cultural and social perspectives and Gronn’s hybrid leadership. In this regard, leadership practice is not considered as an exclusive leadership style but with varying practices, causes and effects.

Thus, it is more important to examine the quality and nature of leadership practice than to evaluate leadership approaches (Harris and Spillane, 2008). As Bolden et al. (2009, p. 264) contend, regarding the nature of leadership, what matters most is “the important balance between individual, collective and situational aspects of leadership practice, and importantly, when and why particular configurations are more effective and/or desirable than others”. Popper (2005) asserts that science progresses with the theory of *survival of the fittest* rather than logical thinking. According to Lumby (2013, p. 592),

> Distributed leadership has proved admirably fit and adapted to the needs of the early 21st century school environment, both in reconciling staff to neoliberal conditions in the workplace and as part of a much longer propensity whereby troubling underlying power structures are written out of thinking.

2.7. How are Leadership Skills Developed?

Harris (2013) argues that leadership will be widely distributed in future schools. In preparation for distributed leadership, there is a requirement for developing leadership skills. Van et al. (2009, p. 777) argue the connection between distributed leadership and developing leadership skills:

> Developing the leadership skills of the workforce without facilitating the conditions for distributed leadership to thrive would quite likely lead to frustrations and inhibited effectiveness and engagement, whereas the facilitation of the necessary conditions without development of the required skills would likely lead to confusion and misalignment of teams with the wider organisational context.

Fullan (2010) mentions that collective capacity building is the only way to achieve sustainable, large-scale success and improvement. This points to the importance of harnessing the leadership capacities and professional skills of both leaders and other staff members (Harris, 2014). To engage with other partners within organisations, any individual who can be defined as a leader will need to have a repertoire of skills and to focus on building leadership capability (Harris, 2013). Hairon and Goh (2015, p. 709) list certain leadership abilities that need to be developed; these include:

> taking initative, rallying others toward common group goals, considering individual needs of group members in decision making, making decision based on micro and macro contextual knowledge (for example, situational and organisational analysis), and promoting shared ownership and accountability.

Harris (2013) proposes three steps to develop leadership skills. Firstly, formal leaders need to create structural and cultural environments in which individuals can flourish. He writes, "the creation of structures and routines that enable teachers to take on leadership responsibilities and thus hone teachers' leadership skill can also contribute to the distribution of responsibility for leadership functions and routines" (p. 44). Spillane (2012) points out that there are two approaches to reframing existing leadership positions and creating designated positions: volunteerism, and vote and election. In this regard, the role of leaders is to provide incentives and resources for informal leaders (Leithwood et al., 2009a).

Secondly, formal leaders need to maximise opportunities for informal leaders to display their leadership potential and abilities. He wrote that leadership ability can be maximised by "broad-based leadership" (Harris, 2013, p. 153), achieved through taking on decision-making responsibility, a high degree of autonomy and involvement, "professional learning communities" and "professional collaboration" (Harris, 2014, p. 37). According to Mujis and Harris (2003), in order to improve leadership skills, it is helpful for teachers to spend time making session plans and discussing issues about curriculum, as well as collaborating, organising study groups and school visits, etc. By doing so, leadership skills can be enhanced by learning from each other through mutual reflection, peer coaching, observation and mentoring (Little, 1995). Improving leadership skills can also be achieved by organising teacher training, vocational training, and adult learning programmes (Beare, 2006). Based on Spillane's (2012) studies regarding the development of teachers' capabilities, many of the schools in which he worked have also implemented development methods such as professional development trainings and meetings. Leadership training is beneficial not only for leadership improvement but also for improvements in teaching and learning (Edwards, 2014).

Thirdly, in order to develop leadership abilities, the leadership focus needs to shift from the traditional leader-follower relationship to interactions between organisational members (Harris, 2013). Firestone and Martinez (2009, p. 77)

show that some schools have established peer coaching and group meetings which manifest "the same interactions that provided the information for monitoring also provided the opportunities for coaching". Building trust is a prime precondition for developing leadership capacity through interaction (MacBeath, 2009); instead of scrutinising and monitoring performance, leaders should utilise other strategies to build trust such as peer evaluation, mentoring, openness to challenge and critique, and creating opportunities for exchanging ideas and mutual learning. According to Hairon and Goh (2015), the core theme of building trust between school leaders and staff members depends upon whether subordinates have the capability to make right decisions. However, it is noted that the leadership abilities of staff may be hindered by the accountability framework which "plays a significant role in shaping how school leaders develop leadership competencies in staff members" (p. 709). Considering this, Hairon and Goh (2015) infer that within Asian contexts, accountability may be still mainly taken by school leaders, as hierarchy may not encourage accountability to be shared among co-leaders.

The sustainable development of leadership skills needs to involve everyone. Tashi (2015) claims that teachers need to have more resources and training in order to understand their responsibilities as qualified informal leaders. Principals should commit to leadership distribution and decrease their hold on decision-making power. They should also be consistent in motivating teachers to take on leadership responsibilities and simultaneously allowing teachers' actions to have actual influence on the decision-making process. School leaders should be able to recognise potential leadership abilities and help teachers build leadership skills. Local authorities should also recognise that the criteria rely upon knowledge and expertise rather than experience (Tashi, 2015).

2.8. Distributed Leadership in Practice

2.8.1. Distributed Leadership in Schools

There has been an abundant body of research published since the millennium which draws upon theoretical and empirical literature on distributed leadership in schools (Harris, 2013). Most studies have revealed the impact of distributed leadership on organisational performance (Copland, 2003; Camburn, 2003; Spillane and Sherer, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004; Stoll and Seashore-Louis, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006 and 2009a). Another main research focus is to examine the role of principals in distributed leadership. For example, Anderson et al. (2009) carried out a five-year large-scale study within 180 American schools located in 44 regions. By utilising questionnaire surveys with principals and teachers, undertaking interviews and classroom observations, and using school performance data for documentary analysis, Anderson et al. aimed to identify the role of principals in distributed leadership and also the relationship between patterns of distributed leadership and student performance.

Firstly, a teacher survey with a 6-part scale from low to high was employed to measure collective leadership; data was gathered from school teams, parent advisory groups, and some parents and students. Then, five representative schools were selected as having collective distribution in various levels and went into the second round of data collection. According to Anderson et al. (2009), based upon Gronn's (2002) *addictive and holistic leadership theory*, each school was respectively categorized into addictive and holistic distribution models but the study did not clarify the categories of three of the schools. In this regard, it can be observed that this study indicates the importance of structures and emphasises the variability of leadership. As Anderson et al. (2009, p. 120) wrote, "while formal organisational structures create an institutional landscape for the distribution and enactment of leadership, they do not necessarily determine how it plays out over time". This study also reveals two major functions of principals: developing people, and setting goals. Distributed leadership in practice is formed by the involvement of different experts such as teachers, district officers and others. The researchers at the end presented an indirect link between distributed leadership and student performance (Anderson et al., 2009). It can be noted that the study's findings can be generalized for wider conclusions due to its use of different research methods to maximize research validity and triangulation.

Co-performance, which refers to the interaction between leaders and informal leaders, has also been specifically researched within the educational context. Based upon the theory of *the leadership-plus approach* and *collaborated distribution*, a study conducted by Spillane et al. (2009) in an American urban school district aimed to illustrate how school principals at work manage and lead. The authors carried out a longitudinal study by employing experience sampling method (ESM) logs, questionnaires for head teachers and for staff respectively, observations and interviews of head teachers, and response records of open-ended scenarios from head teachers. Finding shows that co-performance is a commonplace phenomenon; over one-quarter of the leadership activities are led by staff members with no formal positions. Distinct from previous distributed leadership studies which examined *the leadership-plus approach* by focusing on individuals in formal and informal positions, this study by Spillane et al works from an opposite direction by finding out *who* are the individuals that hold responsibilities specifically within the leadership activities. However, the limitation of the study is that researchers only identified collaborated distribution practices and did not capture collective and coordinated distribution.

Grubb and Flessa (2006) conducted research into distributed leadership with non-traditional principal-ship (e.g. co-principal, rotating principal and no principal) within nine racially heterogeneous schools in California and one in Massachusetts. By employing semi-structured interviews and observations, the study shows that the underlying reasons for employing various leadership approaches includes personal relationships (e.g. abrasive staff members and the principal's exhaustion), bureaucratic or structure factors (e.g. school size), culture, availability of resources and stability (e.g. intention to keep professional staff). The study also reveals that co-principals are beneficial for sharing decisions and burdens; according to Grubb and Flessa (2006, p. 533),

> So multiple principals are compatible with many different forms of distributing leadership. The division of responsibilities between several co-principals can vary, and the possibilities for interchangeability, for

specialization, and for modeling collaboration vary from school to school.

Distinct from most studies, this study primarily points out the relationship between unconventional distributed leadership and districts. It illustrates the potential conflicts between unconventional leadership and districts; "a non-hierarchical school with unconventional principals might create discomfort for district administrators accustomed to conventional hierarchies and qualifications" (p. 533).

As is mentioned above, most early studies mainly focus on the roles of leaders and staff members but ignore the power of districts (Firestone and Martinez, 2009). By conducting research within four schools and three districts, the study of Firestone and Martinez examined the mechanisms of distributed leadership and emphasised the roles of both teacher-leaders and districts. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NCF), researchers employed observations, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis to collect data; there were eight interviewees on average in each school and each of them was interviewed six times. The findings suggest that teacher-leaders and districts are also sharing leadership tasks and they play complementary roles in distributed leadership practice. Firestone and Martinez (2009, p. 62) claim that this "expands the focus of leadership distribution to the district…which we hope to pursue in future analyses so as to bring out the role of the district office".

A study by Leithwood et al. (2009a) is one of the overall distributed leadership studies, as its aims to identify patterns of distributed leadership, performers of leadership functions, and the factors that promote and hinder leadership distribution. By using quantitative methods followed with a qualitative approach, four elementary schools and four secondary schools in an urban district of Ontario were invited to participate into the study. These schools had been encouraged to promote distributed leadership for decades. 225 teachers finished the questionnaires and nominated 19 leaders who were subsequently invited to be interviewed, along with 31 principals in total, and six students in each school. Focusing on both schools and districts, Leithwood et al. re-used a framework

from their old study, the *four alignment forms* and claim that effective patterns ranging from low to high are respectively anarchic misalignment, spontaneous misalignment, spontaneous alignment and planful alignment. The findings also present four core leadership functions consisting of "setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional program" (p. 240). The characteristics that non-administrator leaders are supposed to have include "interpersonal skills, organisational skills, personal qualities, professional qualities, commitment to an initiative, range of undertaking, respect for others' cultures, source of good ideas, breadth of experience, and designation as a formal leader" (p. 244-245). The study also reveals some of the elements that can nurture distributed leadership, such as the collaborative structure, expert-oriented instead of position-oriented, open culture, and freedom from internal dissent and favouritism.

In recent years, research started to identify distributed leadership with equity and learning, and with influential factors (Woods and Roberts, 2016; Woods and Woods, 2013; Revai and Schnellbach, 2013; Duif et al., 2013; Liu, Bellibas and Printy, 2018). Révai and Schnellbach (2013), for example, conducted a study in Hungary to reveal the relationship between distributed leadership and equity and learning. By using mixed methods achieved by a questionnaire survey, interviews, documentary analysis and a case study, Révai and Schnellbach found that there is a strong positive correlation between distributed leadership and the learning performance of students. The study also identified several factors that impede distributed leadership, such as rigid organisational structure, the independent and strong personalities of selected experts, and jealousy. Finally, the authors gave a useful interpretation of distributed leadership as a guideline for future researchers: "Distributed leadership can also be seen as a process, which changes with time, with the maturity of the group of partners as a team (team of teachers, group of students, etc.) with the experience of the leader" (p. 42).

As a representative study that identifies influence factors in distributed leadership, the study by Duif et al. (2013) researched variables of distributed leadership from three aspects, covering personal features (seniority, gender and position), school

related features (educational structures; school leaders' responsibility for the classroom; education type; school size; and employment type; geographical location), and external features (financial crisis and policy development). 1,093 respondents who worked as leaders or teachers in European schools completed questionnaires. The findings reveal that the extent of distributed leadership perceived by female leaders is slightly higher than that perceived by male leaders; the professionals are more likely to perceive a higher extent of distributed leadership than those with shorter tenure. In addition, the perceived extent of distributed leadership varies with geographical location in Europe. This is consistent with the context-specific viewpoint and implies that research contexts can be understood within different kinds of classifications (e.g. from the level of political economic and cultural perspectives, level of global, national, regional and organisational perspectives). Duif et al. (2003, p. 23) also find that "a higher education level (type of education) goes hand in hand with a less perceived extent of distributed leadership".

A recent study about distributed leadership and the factors which influence it was conducted by Liu et al. (2018), who carried out the research by analysing the dataset of a 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey among 32 countries in five continents. Aiming to examine the correlation between distributed leadership and influence factors of school contexts and individual characteristics, the study is claimed as the first large-scale study of distributed leadership and influence factors. The study indicates that stakeholders in schools of Europe and South America have broader participation in decision-making and there is more leadership distribution. Within the schools, the principals and female respondents perceive higher extent of leadership distribution than teachers and male respondents respectively; whereas between schools, those that gain more public funding show a higher extent of distributed leadership. School management type, school location and size do not have a significant influence on the extent of distributed leadership. Although the results of tested variables in these study cannot be ascertained as a standard answer for all organisations because findings vary with contexts, systematic classifications in influence factors of distributed leadership within these study shows the gradual maturity of its

research development. The variables mentioned in these study can also be a guideline for future research.

2.8.2. Distributed Leadership in Higher Education

2.8.2.1. The Features of Higher Education

The main differences between school leadership and leadership in Higher Education have been pointed out by several scholars (Richards, 2012; Bolden et al., 2009; Edwards, 2014; Knight and Trowler, 2000). The study of Bolden et al. (2009, p. 269) reveals that, as distinct from schools, leading in a "consensual fashion", leadership within the Higher Education context is bureaucratic, hierarchical and non-consensual. Consensual in this context can be understood as meaning having the same goals. The main goal of schools is teaching. According to Richards (2012), formal teaching is the key business of school-based educational leaders, and all the activities are teaching-oriented; in comparison with schools, teaching is only part of the business in the Higher Education setting. As Blackmore (2012 cited in Edwards, 2014, p.33) explains, "universities are characterized by problematic goals in that there is no universally shared view of the purpose of higher education", even though, the position of teaching in universities is still important. Edwards (2014) carried out a study examining how distributed leadership enhances teaching and learning in Higher Education. Within the case university, "teaching was core and central to the whole institution and the primary activity for academic staff is teaching and learning" (p. 10). Besides teaching, the other important function of universities is research, which according to Richard (2012) helps bring personal achievements and financial benefits for researchers and simultaneously contributes to the organisational development of the university.

Tjeldvoll (2011) mentioned the *service university* as a dominant new version of modern universities. Service universities comply with competitive markets and provide a community service for stakeholders and customers. The current

stakeholders and customers are employees and employers. Teaching and research in service universities are "carried out separately, either within one university, or between two institutions, one being a pure research university and the other a pure teaching university" (p. 224). Both kinds of university aim to achieve "world class quality" (p. 224), and differentiating policies between these two universities are discussed using examples from both the UK and Australia. It is necessary for universities in those countries that make money by attracting international students, to become top quality universities in teaching.

Another feature of universities in the 21st century is internationalisation. Internationalisation refers to the inclusion of an intercultural, international "and global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process" (Knight, 2004, p. 6). As he states, "internationalisation is changing the world of higher education, and globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation" (p. 5). The international tendency of current tertiary education is influenced by globalisation (Tjeldvoll, 2011). One advantage of this is the increased ease with which theories and ideas may be expressed and spread within a global knowledge society. The perception of leadership differences within different countries may be reduced, albeit there are still boundaries. For example, traditional Confucianism in Asian regions may hinder these organisational changes. Nonetheless, Liden (2012, p. 206) wrote about the benefit that internationalisation can bring for leadership in both Asian and Western universities:

> The immense popularity of Western designed MBA programmes offered in Asian countries, as well as the frequency with which Asian students pursue graduate degrees in these Western countries has led to the transplant of many Western practices within the managerial ranks of Asian countries, especially in China. As a result, the leadership practices in Asian and Western countries should become more closely aligned over time, especially given increased international travel and rapid growth in the worldwide usage of the internet.

Likewise, universities in Asia have their own strengths within a global world. One of the leading characteristics of globalisation and internationalisation is

competition, and Tjeldvoll holds that students from Asian cultures are more likely to get used to competitive behaviours and environments. Therefore, leaders within Asian universities benefit from having such students to strengthen the competiveness of universities against western universities. Nevertheless, Asian universities also have their own problems and barriers to internationalisation. For example, the rhetoric of internationalisation in Japan is much better than its actual implementation. While internationalisation is purported to be a strategic goal in Japan, there are fewer courses provided for foreign students who have not mastered Japanese. The situation is similar in other Asian countries, such as China and Korea. English is not accepted as a common language in universities for teaching, researching and preparing piblications. Language becomes a major obstacle to both foreign students and scholars to understanding and exploring within Asian universities.

Even within a university, there exist many different cultures. As Knight and Trowler (2001, p. 40) argue:

> Universities have not one but many cultures: they are characterized by a shifting multiple cultural configuration so that norms, values and taken-for-granted practices and attitudes may be as different from department to department… as they are between one university and the next.

Geographical dispersion can be one of the elements that bring diverse cultures into a university. Harris (2008) proposes that leadership in Higher Education is distant, as the geographic dispersion and separation challenge the team and individuals to gather around and solve the problems. Dispersion and separation hinders collaboration and partnership as it poses a challenge which individuals and teams must work to solve together (Harris, 2008). As Blackmore (2012 cited in Edwards, 2014, p.33) wrote, "there is also fluid participation, referring to the tendency for academic staff not to relate very closely to the 'home' institution, but often to be better networked with colleagues in other institutions".

However, unlike most schools, universities have their exclusive departmental cultures. Knight and Trowler (2000) wrote that school members are engaged within a range of activity systems, while individuals and academic staff in universities are members of only one activity system, their academic department. It is noted that discipline in universities is strongly upheld by faculties and this departmental loyalty has often outweighed loyalty to the universities (Altbach and Lewis, 1996). As Knight and Trowler (2000 p. 69) argue, "this is the central locus of cultural enactment and importantly, construction in universities which are inevitably, extremely culturally complex organizations". Bryman (2007) also supports the idea that departments play a significant role in universities. He writes,

> The department represents a crucial unit of analysis in universities, as it is often, if not invariably, a key administrative unit for the allocation of resources, and the chief springboard for the organization's main teaching and research activities. (2007, p. 694)

One of the most appealing aspects of the nature of working as an academic in Higher Education settings is the freedom enjoyed in the role. As an interviewee says in Knight and Trowler's (2000, p. 73) study, "you can be your own manager, you have more freedom. You can work at your own pace". The counterpoint however of this freedom is the feeling of isolation which may accompany of it. Besides possibly feeling isolated and thereby uneasy, this freedom may also engender conflicted roles, a lack of clarity around goals, lack of feedback, and uncertainty. Knight and Trowler list some other features of Higher Education leadership that may hinder the improvement of teaching and learning; these are outlined as "intensification", "hard-managerialism", "a loss of collegiality", "greedy institutions", and "ageing, malaise and marginality" (2000, p. 71-72). Intensification refers to the increased demands and expectations on leaders in Higher education, including the pressure of publication, an increasing marking workload, and longer working hours, while the mental space, energy and time for improvement in teaching and learning are decreased. Hard-managerialism appears when universities become gradually more professional in their approach

to management and leadership; conversely, faculties are often seen as being less trusted and professional. Due to the division of working time and increasing administrative loads, faculties may see themselves as opposed to teaching and development (Altbach and Lewis, 1996, Knight and Trowler, 2000). There are several factors causing the loss of collegiality, such as lack of time to socialise, and less time to spend actually working in the university. In this regard, staff members in universities may lose the opportunity to discuss and solve the problems in teaching and learning together.

Knight and Trowler (2000) describe institutions as *greedy* in nature because of their unrelenting requirements on staff members, especially on female academics and young workers. This might happen more in certain Asian contexts which are significantly influenced by paternalism and patriarchal cultures. Younger workers may be regarded as novices and expected to do extra service and administrative work. However, there is no clear boundary in place to protect those in leadership from the negative effects of the extra work they engage in and cap the extra work to a safe level. An interviewee in their study complains that administrative work could consume as much time and effort as teaching and researching; "service, like teaching, was a fixed commitment and one that could expand in proportion to the academic's level of conscientiousness" (p. 74). The studies of Currie (1996) and Fisher (1994) in faculties in Australia, New Zealand and the UK have also suggested that this disproportionate and heavy workload may cause stress, alienation and tensions between academics' work and personal life. The final feature discussed by Knight and Trowler, ageing, malaise and marginality refers to the feeling of academics who feel uncomfortable and marginalised with age. Their ability to innovate and be adventurous is hindered by the decreased self-confidence and self-esteem (Knight and Trowler, 2000).

2.8.2.2. Challenges of Leadership in Higher Education

A definition of leadership in Higher Education is given by Ramsden (1998, p. 4):

> A practical and everyday process of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues… leadership in universities should be by everyone from the Vice Chancellor to the casual car parking attendant, leadership is to do with how people relate to each other.

Marshall (2006) considers leadership *within* Higher Education complex, as it is a multifaceted process that must place an emphasis on both individual improvement and organisational development. Szekeres (2004) argues that Higher Education over the last two decades has been subject to a plethora of changes. It includes an increase in marketisation and managerialism, increasing investigation alongside wider assigned responsibility (audit), "controlling accountability regime" (Zepke, 2007, p. 311), and changing operations and structures being treated as corporate institutions (corporatisation). Leadership, in this regard, is top-down and performative (Zepke, 2007). Much criticism has been levelled at this situation. Bolden et al. (2009) condemn it as not suitable and incompatible with the expectation of academic freedom, consultation and collegiality in universities. Edwards (2014, p. 3) goes on to state that, teaching in universities "will likely be scrutinized like never before". The current state of affairs has also resulted in increased resentment from academic staff due to the impending leadership crisis, the reduction in authority, and newly established administration procedures (Coates et al., 2009). Universities are currently facing the dual challenges of creating chances to build and develop sustainable leadership while simultaneously competing in globalisation (Jones, 2012).

With respect to leadership itself, Bolden et al. (2009) summarise alternative leadership forms in Higher Education that are inefficient and unsatisfactory in practice. The study reveals that leadership in universities can be dislocated, disconnected, disengaged, dissipated, distant and dysfunctional. Following are the detailed descriptions of each unsustainable leadership form:

- Dislocated: top-down and bottom-up systems do not match up/ leadership does not occur where it is needed
- Disconnected: pulling in different directions/ lack of consistent

directions and visions/competing agendas

- Disengage: staffs avoids being involved in leadership/ leadership is seen as unappealing, unrewarding and unnecessary
- Dissipated: leadership is too broadly diffused within groups with little responsibility and accountability for implementing actions and decisions
- Distant: leadership is removed from operational level of the organisation/ inaccessible, imposed
- Dysfunctional: leadership fails to achieve its intentions/ causes unexpected outcomes/ misalignment of performance measures. (Bolden et al., 2009, p. 268)

It is noted that, although this is a guideline for summarising inefficient leadership practices in a Higher Education context, it does not mean that all leadership practice within the situations mentioned above could be arbitrarily summarised as absolutely inefficient. Leadership in practice is dynamic and complicated and should be understood and analysed with caution.

In terms of the external environment of leadership in High Education, there is great pressure on universities to change. In the last few decades, the management principles of the private sector have been largely adopted and have gradually replaced the collegial structure of governance and the conventional principles of leadership in Higher Education sectors (Van et al., 2009). Universities are required by the government to prove their value for public findings; for example, in the UK context, Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) are two requirements giving evidence of government pressures. With the "expectations from the private sector around the provision of appropriately trained graduates" and the competition between universities for funding support and students enrolments, all of these pressures have resulted in the "commoditization of knowledge work" (p. 764) which we are experiencing. The effects are described by Van et al. (2009, p. 764):

As a result, Higher Education institutions are no longer the protected

entities whose legitimacy is taken for granted, but instead are expected to face the complexity of balancing the need to operate according to market pressures, teach an increased number of students despite diminishing financial means while struggling to maintain traditional academic and educational principles of quality.

Birnbaum (2000) criticises that these newly-introduced principles which originated from private sectors and implemented in universities, are derived from approaches and principles based on old-fashioned ideas and abandoned fads. The tension between these principles and traditional leadership notions have led to a struggle in Higher Education sectors (Van et al., 2009). Although there are a range of leadership models and theories, universities are asking for an approach with less hierarchy, and simultaneously considering their professional and specialised context (Jones et al., 2012).

Bryman's (2007) study aims to identify effective leadership in Higher Education. By systematically analysing literature from the UK, the USA and Australia, Bryman proposes that there are 13 leadership behaviours that facilitate successful leadership at a departmental level within Higher Education. Those behaviors include:

- A clear sense of direction/strategic vision
- Preparing department arrangements to facilitate moving in the direction set
- Being considerate
- Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity
- Being trustworthy and having personal integrity
- Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions
- Encouraging open communication
- Communicating well about the direction the department is going
- Acting as a role model and having credibility
- Creating a positive/ collegial work atmosphere
- Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies

internal and external to the university

- Providing feedback on performance (Bryman, 2007, p. 697).

Bryman also claims that there are two specific leadership behaviours associated with research-oriented institutions or institutions with a strong research culture and tradition. To achieve effective leadership, leaders should "provide resources for and adjust workloads to stimulate scholarship and research" and "make academic appointments that enhance the department's reputation" (p. 703). As Jones et al. (2014, p. 605) state, "it is not surprising that research into a more appropriate leadership for Higher Education is embracing a more collective, districted approach to leadership", although more empirical studies are required to support its implementation. It is believed that distributed leadership practices "show promise in overcoming some of these tensions and help Higher Education institutions deal more effectively with the pressures of adapting to ever increasing rates of environmental change" (Van et al., 2009, p. 777).

2.8.2.3. The Development of Distributed Leadership in Higher Education

It should be noted that most, although not all, of the existing literature on distributed leadership relates to schools rather than to Higher Education. This is because the theory of distributed leadership originates in the school context. Although studies of distributed leadership are less prolific in Higher Education, the number of distributed leadership studies addressing the leadership complexities in Higher Education setting is growing (e.g. Zepke, 2007; Bolden et al., 2009; Van et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012 and 2014; Jones and Harvey, 2017; etc.) (Edwards, 2014). Edwards (2014) wrote that in recent years, more attention has been paid to distributed leadership in Higher Education because distributed leadership has been suggested as a "means of delivering on the challenges of the changing landscape" (Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2008 cited in Edwards, 2014, p. 5) in Higher Education. The strong link between distributed leadership and Higher Education is maintained by Gosling et al. (2009, p. 303):

> Distributed leadership is an effective term within HE because it resonates both with the experiences and expectations of university staff. It embraces notions of collegiality and autonomy while addressing the need for management. However it performs a rhetorical function that may well outstrip its ability to hold up under scrutiny as a true descriptor of leadership practice within the sector.

However, there were some dissenting voices regarding distributed leadership in universities more than a decade ago. Zepke (2007) claimed that distributed leadership may not be recognised as a leadership model, although it may exist, because distributed leadership seems unnecessary in the "hostile environment" (p. 311) of the audit culture. The culture and environment that Zepke mentioned refers to a Higher Education context. Likewise, Bolden et al. (2009) used to hold that, compared with collective achievements, individual achievements are rewarded more in universities; the nature of bureaucracy in universities combined with its imbalances of resources, authority and power, are contrasted with the premises and principles of distributed leadership.

However, Bolden et al. (2009) later claim that research into leadership and management in Higher Education shows that leadership is widely distributed or should be distributed across the Higher Education institution. Whilst it is likely that leadership is widely distributed in Higher Education contexts, it may not be fully controllable and recognized. Edwards (2014) reveals that the core of approaches and conceptual frameworks of distributed leadership are consistent with the Higher Education setting, although probably to a much lesser degree. However, there is a lack of studies indicating its implications and how it works in practice (Bolden et al. 2009). They wrote:

> It is still not clear what is actually distributed (in terms of power or accountability), the process by which it is distributed, or whether the concept itself offers substantial benefits for either practice, analysis or policy-making (p. 258).

The existing empirical research into distributed leadership within universities mainly emphasises those individuals in formal positions, such as department heads and deans (Edwards, 2014). “There is a layer of leadership that has not been engaged with (i.e. that which occurs below formal leadership at the School/Department level)” (Gosling et al., 2009, p. 17).

The requirement for holistic studies including individuals at both formal and practitioner level is pointed out by Edwards (2014) who carried out a representative study with a holistic approach, aiming to examine the evidence of distributed leadership in Higher Education and the function of distributed leadership towards teaching and learning. By employing case studies and conducting semi-structured interviews, questionnaire surveys and documentary analysis, he found that within the researched organisation, teacher-leaders are taking on lots of leadership responsibilities such as initiating subjects, subject development and networking. Drawing upon the implication of distributed leadership in Higher Education, he proposes that more academic staff should be engaged with leadership opportunities. The researcher takes perceived political influences into consideration and emphasises that it is essential to strengthen the professional learning community for the purpose of organizational development.

In the UK Higher Education context, it is noted that distributed leadership has already became commonplace and been widely recognised (Gosling et al, 2009). The study of Bolden and Gosling (2008) shows that in 152 interviews conducted with university leaders in the UK from 2006 to 2007, few of the respondents requested clarification of the term. Simultaneously, “partly in response to these challenges the Higher Education sectors in the UK is increasingly espousing the practice of *distributed leadership*” (Bolden et al., 2009, p. 258). The committee structure in most of the UK universities is rationalised for decision-making and bottom-up influence. Bolden and Gosling (2008)’s study in UK universities also indicates that, in regard to the discourse of distributed leadership, there is a stable transition in administration models, shifting from collegial to managerial, with an erosion of conventional routes for bottom-up influence such as collective bargaining by trade unions and the committee system.

In the last decade, there have been two main representative distributed leadership studies in UK universities: Van et al. (2009), which explores the nature of distributed leadership in universities and the factors that may enhance or hinder its effectiveness, and Bolden et al. (2009). Bolden et al. conducted an extensive study based on twelve UK universities with different locations, sizes, types and disciplines, aiming to explore the perception of distributed leadership in Higher Education organizations, how distributed leadership is sustained, the links between distributed leadership and procedures and systems (i.e. personnel, finance), and the personal experiences of administrative and academic leaders. By conducting 152 interviews with people at different levels and conducting documentary analysis plus two collaborative workshops, the study summarised the findings from a range of respondents including heads of departments, heads of schools, faculty deans, directors of human resources, deputy principals and principals. It indicates that there is a common valuing of distributed leadership identifable not only in the general Higher Education context but also in individual small groups, but the perceived mechanisms of distributed leadership are not a continuum progressing from the primary to the latest model. Bolden et al. also point out that leadership is distributed with boundaries; it is evident in formal distribution, which reveals the significant impact from the top. In terms of the process of distributed leadership, the study finds that clear direction and vision initiated from leader is one of the necessities for distributed leadership. Bolden et al. also maintain that some of the leaders were concerned about their accountability or have trust issues and therefore, have difficulties in letting go of power, control and responsibility. There is no collected data from the practitioner level within this study, meaning the lived organisation is ignored which may cause a research bias. Nonetheless, as a representative study of distributed leadership in Higher Education, the study of Bolden et al. (2009) conducted from university level provides a guideline for future researchers.

There are also studies into distributed leadership within other Western Higher Education contexts, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. For example, Jones et al. (2014) utilised action research and participant reflections in several

Australia universities, aiming to identify distributed leadership in practice and its leadership capacity in teaching and learning. The finding indicates that it is impossible to give a prescriptive definition to the term as distributed leadership is fluid in different contexts; this reflects the various impacts that distributed leadership may bring. The 2014 study also explored an enabling resource called the *Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool*, which is suggested as being applicable across the diversity of institutions within Australia universities. While the utilisation and reliability of this tool needs to be further tested and researched by other scholars, this study is more applicable regarding to research paradigms and goes beyond the conventional distributed leadership studies that are criticised as being subjectivist and normative.

A study by Zepke (2007) in New Zealand aimed to explore the role of distributed leadership in Higher Education and its effectiveness in universities. By utilising observations and documentary analysis in a case study institution in New Zealand, Zepke proposes that there are mainly main three approaches to focus on the relations within an organisation, which are relations between practitioners and practitioners, practitioners and outside people, and practitioners and leaders. The research indicates that distributed leadership is applicable within the Higher Education context; even though senior management needs to correspond with an audit structure pulled from society, it does not prevent the development of distributed leadership. Zepke tentatively answers the research question by pointing out the considerable role that distributed leadership plays in Higher Education, "provided the meaning of accountability is reframed to mean being mutually responsible to other actors in the higher education enterprise, rather than merely meeting auditable standard" (p. 313). Common values of distributed leadership, which include common goals, responsibilities and accountabilities, mutual trusts and structural advantages are also pointed out by Zepke (2007).

Shifting the research focus from Western to Asian countries, it is noted that the "corpus of knowledge on e*ducational leadership and management* in East Asia is still in a very early stage of development" (Walker and Hallinger, 2015, p. 554). The dearth of knowledge in East Asian educational leadership and management

was first noticed and researched by Bajunid (1996) in the Malaysian context two decades ago. As for the volume of research that related to leadership in East Asian contexts from 2000 to 2011, there have been only 184 published articles, 6% of the total journal articles in eight core ELM journals (Hallinger and Bryant, 2013). According to Walker and Hallinger (2015, p. 563), in 2015, "the Hong Kong and China reviews represent only the second published reviews for their societies". In 2016, Chai, Jeong, Kim, Kim and Hamlin (2016, p. 790) claim their empirical study as a first attempt to examine Korean leadership effectiveness, and consider it as a "cornerstone" in "Korea and other East Asian contexts". The problem of educational leadership in East Asia is described by Hallinger and Bryant (2013, p. 627):

> Not only is the overall production of regional knowledge in educational leadership small in volume, but is also produced from a very limited set of societies and universities. In sum, the knowledge that is being generated by regional universities cannot provide a valid representation of problems, policies, or practices in educational leadership and management across the region.

Nevertheless, as Walker and Hallinger (2015) note, "these conclusions employ Western conventions as benchmarks". The knowledge of educational leadership and management in East Asian nations published in their own languages are not included and discussed by Western scholars. This emphasises the importance of this current study.

In fact, there has been a remarkable development of studies of educational leadership in Asian universities (Hallinger and Bryant, 2013). According to Hallinger and Bryant, there are increasing numbers of graduate students, faculty members, degree programmes, and universities and institutions in East Asian Higher Education sectors. Hallinger and Bryant further argue that the growth of graduate degree programmes such as PhD, EdD, MPhil and MA cultivates more and more scholars and researchers to conduct theoretical and empirical studies in Asian regions. Considering the rapid economic development in Asian Pacific

countries, it is worth pondering whether leadership in East Asian universities, influenced by Confucianism, is beneficial for improving their competitive power (Tjeldvoll, 2011). Leadership in Western universities is required to shift into an achievement-oriented leadership model as there are different forces at play between academic freedom and democracy respectively; no matter how the reforms go, university professors are fearful of changes because of the risk of managerialism, and reduced academic freedom and less democracy (Tjeldvoll, 2011). An effective university leadership is sought in Western countries, while Tjeldvoll (2011, p. 226) points out that hierarchy and Confucian culture "may contribute to more efficiency for the university as a whole".

Tjeldvoll, Chen and Yang (2008) carried out a project attempting to examine relations between Asian Confucianism and six dimensions of university leadership including internationalisation, market relations and funding, personnel policies, information and communication technology, teaching and research, and management. By researching leaders in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japanese universities, they discovered that there are three characteristics in Confucianism which are at play within leadership in Higher Education: high efforts and motivations, acceptance of hierarchical leadership and "high competition orientation" (Tjeldvoll et al., 2011, p. 226). According to Tjeldvoll (2011), orders and hierarchy in Asian cultures may help increase leadership efficiency and promote its implementation. However, it is noted that the Asian nations considered Confucian in nature (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Singapore) are influenced by Confucianism but to different extents. Their national contexts also vary. As Walker and Hallinger (2015, p. 563) assert, "East Asian societies cannot be viewed as an undifferentiated whole".

Considering the complexity of distributed leadership in Asia, it can be noted that for enhancing the implementation of distributed leadership in Asian countries, there is still a long way to go. The dearth of knowledge of both educational leadership and distributed leadership in Asian universities leads to an urgent requirement for exploration of this area. Although knowledge of distributed leadership in Asian Higher Education is very rare, Walker and Hallinger (2015)

categorise leadership contexts and provide a useful framework for helping understand Asian contexts, and carry out further studies in this area. They clarify the contexts as personal, cultural, and political. Personal contexts include values and beliefs, demographic information, career backgrounds and personal factors whereas the contradiction and interplay between Western ideas and traditional Chinese cultural values in educational leadership can be an example of socio-cultural influences. Political contexts emphasise the national perspectives and refer to the relations between organisations and political environments (Walker and Hallinger, 2015).

2.8.2.4. The Function of Distributed Leadership in Higher Education

Existing studies of distributed leadership in universities are considered normative and are criticised for being less democratic in their nature and the way in which they are conducted than its theorization suggests (Jones et al., 2014). Bolden et al. (2009) suggest that some of those university leaders that have real power may abuse distributed leadership as an illusion of participation and consultation while the true mechanism of resource allocation and decision-making is obscured. It is also suggested that rushing into the model of distributed leadership is likely to lead the organisation to lose its direction and vision, and that the real need for accountability and responsibility of individuals is missed (Bolden et al., 2009).

However, distributed leadership in a Higher Education setting is believed to be able to solve some of its problems, as Van et al. (2009) wrote:

> On a conceptual level, the notion of distributed leadership seems well aligned with notions of collegiality and professional autonomy which have traditionally been characteristic of higher education leadership, while also recognizing the wider institutional needs for effectively managing the changes that turbulent environments impose on Higher Education institutions.

Universities can utilise distributed leadership to build social identities; for

example, the concepts of managerialism and collegiality can be embedded, whereas the notions of manager and academic can melt into one (Bolden et al., 2009). Compared with the traditional committee structure in Higher Education, it integrates both top-down and bottom-up influences and provides a more responsive and flexible framework for the decision making process (Bolden et al., 2009). Distributed leadership is generally considered as having a range of benefits such as organisational improvement, higher efficacy of teachers, and higher student learning outcomes, which has been further illustrated in the above section.

2.9. Distributed Leadership with Chinese Culture

2.9.1. Chinese Culture and Leadership

It is important to understand organisational culture in the discourse of leadership when adopting distributed leadership in non-Western contexts (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Hairon and Goh (2015) note that the cross-cultural transferability and implication of distributed leadership theories and practices are attributed to the similarities between Western cultures while the majority of leadership theories to date originate in Western countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia. However, Ho and Tikly (2012) indicate that organisational processes and leadership practice are directly influenced by societal culture. The differences of sociocultural contexts may lead to different kinds of distributed leadership (Feng, 2012). Feng (2012) goes on to state that in this instance, the same approach in different contexts may lead to different results. Therefore, "all theories and interpretations of practice must be 'grounded' in the specific context" (Bush, Coleman and Xiaohong., 1998, p. 137).

The culture of hierarchy is one of the distinct features in China and other Asian contexts. Hierarchy is understood as "one of the ingrained regularities of the institution of schooling that would be difficult to change" (Mayrowetz et al., 2009, p. 184). However, distributed leadership is not contrasted with hierarchy; it

co-exists with fluid and hierarchical structures (Tian et al., 2016). Day et al. (2009) have suggested that distributed leadership even exists in the most tightly structured and hierarchically configured institution. As Woods and Roberts (2016, p. 140) state, "distributed leadership is typically combined with hierarchically distributed leadership authority, though the steepness of hierarchy and the extent of centralized leadership power vary between organizational settings". Likewise, hierarchy is not necessarily considered as a negative factor for leadership distribution (Woods and Roberts, 2016). Woods and Woods (2013) mention that hierarchy may be beneficial for distributed leadership practice as it can be seen as a way of balancing democratic and hierarchical values. Woods and Roberts (2016) add that many students prefer a hierarchical institutional structure within which they can enjoy both freedom and safety.

Chinese traditional values and cultures have been consistent through hundreds and thousands of years (Wong, 2001). Wong explains that due to its stable agrarian society and geographical isolation, China was isolated for over two thousand years and only started to consider other philosophies in the nineteenth century "when China was forced to open its doors by the imperialist West" (p. 311). China was not an open system until the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by Mao Zedong in 1965 (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). According to Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 59):

> Its long and distinguished history, and its own distinctive cultural traditions, means that it is unwise to seek understanding through the application of theories derived from very different Western countries. The sheer scale and diversity of educational provision also militates against an approach based on Western models.

Traditional Chinese culture is deeply rooted in Confucian idealism (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Hofstede and Bond (1988) claim that the core value of hierarchical relationships is Confucianism. According to Pye (1984 cited in Fan, 2000, p. 6), "Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential thought, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis

for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behavior". It is about the moral and behavioural doctrine regarding ethics, virtuous behaviour, social structures and human relationship (Fan, 2000). Confucius defined five codes of human relations and five principles, called *Wu Lun* which respectively includes sovereign and subject/master and follower; father and son; husband and wife; elder and younger brothers; and friend and friend (five human relations); and loyalty and duty; love and obedience; obligation and submission; seniority and modelling subject; and trust (five principles) (Fan, 2000). Among these terms, there are three family relations, and notably the male terms are those used in expressing these relations. This points to the importance of family and the origin of paternalism in Chinese culture. As Liden (2012, p. 206) argues, "leadership in China is inextricably tied to the central role that family plays in Chinese culture"; within Chinese societies, any organisations are seen as a "work family". Influenced by patriarchy, leaders are assumed as a *father* and are supposed to take care of the *family*. This patriarchal culture continues to influence the positions of women and men in education leadership (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Although the position and treatment of Chinese women has greatly improved since the establishment of PRC, the patriarchal culture has been deeply rooted in traditional values and is therefore underlying and somewhat unconscious in Chinese society and Chinese education. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 66) comment:

> the predominant elements of Chinese culture remain in place and continue to influence school leadership, which remains overwhelmingly male, with a balance of hierarchy and collectivism.

The Chinese Culture Collection (1987) conducted a survey with Chinese social scientists and summarised seventy-one traditional Chinese values as Chinese Culture Values (CCVs). According to Fan (2000, p. 8), these include: "veneration for the old"; "deference to authority"; "conformity/ group orientation"; "avoiding confrontation"; "*guanxi* (personal connection or networking)"; "being gentlemanly anytime" etc. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 59) write, "a central part of these approaches was an emphasis on traditions and the linked patriarchal clan system".

Bush and Haiyan (2000) summarise four main traditional Chinese cultural aspects that may relate to leadership in Chinese education; these include 'worshipping the tradition', 'adoring authority', 'emphasising ethical and moral self-cultivation' and 'stressing collectivism'. With respect to the tradition of worship, Wang and Mao (1996) note that the traditional Chinese culture has a great impact on the characteristics and developmental processes of Chinese education. For example, the recitation of traditional classics is commonly used as a method of teaching and learning (Wang and Mao, 1996). It is of paramount importance to observe traditional culture. However, as one of the reasons behind China's historic 'closed door policy', worshiping the tradition will be harmful for the country's development and should be balanced with foreign cultures.

Adoring authority also originates in Confucianism. The Confucian ethics of faithfulness and altruism are reflected in the five codes of human relations (Wong 2001). Followers should have faithfulness and loyalty towards their masters; children should respect their parents and observe the duty of filial piety; wives should be loyal to their husbands; younger brothers need to follow elder brothers (Wong, 2001). These ethics extend naturally to Chinese education and become one of the underlying facilitating factors of Chinese hierarchical and bureaucratic education structures, wherein a principal "has positional authority" (Bush and Haiyan, 2000, p. 60). According to Liden (2012, p. 206):

> Leaders in Asian countries have a tendency to maintain social distance between themselves and their followers. Leaders, due to the status and power inherent in their positions, protect their emotional distance from subordinates. Part of this adherence to maintaining distance from followers involves the use of authoritarian control to ensure the compliance of subordinates, which is consistent with the paternalistic leader approach.

Likewise, students are also required to respect their "teachers' authority without preconditions" (Wang and Mao, 1996, p. 148). In this regard, instead of teaching and learning through asking questions and discussions, teaching and learning in

Chinese education is mainly achieved through demonstration and lectures (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Although this cultural concept is written as "a consistent virtue of the Chinese nation" by Wang and Mao (1996, p. 145), China is regarded as an "archetypal high power-distance society" (Bush and Haiyan, 2000, p. 60) and it has been suggested that it should shift from its traditional position toward the democratic spirit. Wang and Mao (1996, p. 145) claim that the cultural concept "has deep connections with the rigid social stratification of the clan system in Chinese feudal society".

Collectivism is also addressed as one of the important core values in Chinese culture (Wang and Mao, 1996, Hofstede, 2003). Collectivism is defined by Dimmock and Walker (1998, p. 144):

> in collectivist societies, people place group goals above their personal goals; they are brought up to be loyal to and integrate in strong cohesive groups, which often include extended families… family groups are brought up with a we consciousness, opinions are predetermined by the group, and strong obligations to the family emphasize harmony, respect and shame, at school, learning… focuses on how to do things and on factual knowledge.

In Chinese society, the position of collective benefits is higher than the position of personal needs (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Also originating in Confucianism, collectivism emphasises the importance of working collaboratively, group cohesiveness, relationship maintenance, and harmony building (Ho and Tikly, 2012; Felfe et al., 2008). According to Hallinger et al. (2005), collectivism and high-power distance (HPD) have been recognised as cultural forces that impact on the development of distributed leadership in Asian school contexts. Within East Asian schools, one can observe the "appreciation of the collective well-being and submission of individual freedom to the collective good" (Cheng, 1996, p. 97). Considering this unique cultural value, Liden (2012) argues that, compared with research of leadership in Western contexts, there should be more consideration of organisational environments and interactions between followers and leaders in Asian universities.

The assertion of Liden (2012) points out the importance of interpersonal relationships and communication for Chinese people. Communication habits in the West are more likely to be outcome-oriented, while communication in China tends to be process-oriented (Lin and Clair, 2007). This means that in Chinese society, instead of only focusing on achieving the result, the atmosphere of the conversation and an approachable means of conducting communication between people are more important. Satow and Wang (1994) and Chang Li et al. (2009) argue that paying attention to harmonious relationships with individuals is crucial for achieving both personal and business success in Chinese organisations. This connects with the importance of a Chinese culture value, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationship), in Chinese societies. According to Chen (1997, cited in Tjeldvoll, 2011, p. 226), "Confucianism sees interpersonal relationships as long-term and mutually binding. This is regarded as more important than actual business activities." Thus, aiming to achieve a harmonious and intimate working environment where sorrows and happiness can be shared, Chinese organisation members may pay much more attention to maintaining the quality of relationship with other staff members (Lin and Clair, 2007). Likewise, the communication style will be gentle and kind because of the importance of manners. Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 62) point to the significance of moral and ethical self-cultivation in Chinese culture:

> The traditional Chinese culture emphasizes a person's self-cultivation for ethical and moral perfection. The Confucian scholars advocate modesty and encourage friendly co-operation, giving priority to people's relationships. The purpose of education is to shape every individual into a harmonious member of the society.

The value of collectivism is manifested within educational organisations through the establishment of *Jiaoyanzu*; *Jiaoyanzu* in Mandarin which refers to a group of teachers working together on the same subjects (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Within *jiaoyanzu*, teachers work collegially to discuss questions and materials, observe demonstration lessons, and give feedback (Bush et al., 1998). *Jiaoyaozu*

are characterised by a range of features of collegiality, which is a preferred leadership model in Western culture (Bush, 2006). The positive function of *jiaoyanzu* is addressed by Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 60):

> The collective authority of the teachers through the 'jiaoyanzu' provides a countervailing influence to the power of the principal. The respect for formal authority is tempered by acknowledgement of the need to work collaboratively with teachers.

Besides Chinese traditional culture, Bush and Haiyan also mention the significant influence of Chinese socialist culture. According to Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 66), "the communist revolution added a new dimension to Chinese culture but did not greatly disturb these predominant values and perhaps would have been less successful had it done so". The Chinese socialist system was formally established by Chinese leader Mao Zedong in 1965 (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Different to Western political systems, communism has much more in common with Confucianism (Cleverley, 1991). Bush and Haiyan (2000) give the example that the idea of moral education combines both communist and Confucian values, whereas traditional Chinese collectivism may be reinforced by socialism norms. Socialist culture in Chinese schools and Higher Education is manifested by the establishment of the Communist Party Secretory (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Its function of it is to provide political education to students and faculties and simultaneously ensure that educational leadership and management in China politically follows the Party's principles and guidance (Si, 1993).

The enterprise culture in Chinese society was reinforced with the advent of market socialism in the 1990s (Bush and Haiyan, 2000, Du, 2014). Market socialism is an excellent combination of enterprise and communism and helps maintain the balance between collectivist and individual values (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Chang Li et al. (2009, p. 476) describe the status quo of Chinese enterprise development as:

> A directive hierarchical society has learned to accept distributed leadership in

business and government operations. After shedding the economic burden of government enterprises, China is now embracing the arrival of multinational corporations and international franchises. Even in government operations, the use of grants to promote public welfare has gained popularity.

With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, the dominant role in resource utilisation and allocation has shifted from government planning to market supply and demand (Min, 2004). Closely related to the human resources sector, Higher Education has also changed with market economy to satisfy the requirements of the employment market (Min, 2004). As mentioned earlier, this has manifested in that instead of being assigned jobs by the government, graduates of colleges and universities are able to find jobs on their own and have more freedom to choose their career options (Duan, 2003). This may help change the positions of employees as they will have more opportunities and options.

2.9.2. Leadership Power in Chinese Higher Education

There are three leadership powers in Chinese universities: the power of decision-making, administrative power and academic power (Du, 2014). Distinguished from leadership systems in Western universities, the leadership system in Chinese universities is deeply influenced by political party power (the Chinese Communist Party). As was mentioned in the introduction, the current leadership system in Chinese Higher Education is called the Principal Responsibility System under the Leadership of the Party Committee. The democratic power and power of decision-making in this system are achieved by the faculty congress. The faculty congress system has been in place to enhance democratic management and supervision since the mid-80s, and became a legal entity by Higher Education Law in 1998. Democratic power is well reflected from the institutional perspective, but does not take regulations into practice. However, the faculty congress is claimed to remain only in name by Du (2014), who argues it is the Party which mainly holds the power of decision making. In this regard, Du (2014) additionally claims that most of the management and leadership system reforms of Chinese universities focus on the balance between

administrative power and academic power and therefore, cannot change the fundamental problems of the Chinese leadership system in Higher Education.

With respect to the relationship between administrative power and academic power, it is noted by Du (2014) that the administrative power in Chinese Higher Education is stronger than the academic power. On the one hand, Chinese universities have been managed by Chinese governments for a long time; principals are directly appointed by superior leaders and the Chinese Government. The hierarchical structure hinders the development of academic power. On the other hand, traced back to the traditional Chinese culture, the value of *deference to authority* cultivates *the official standard thought* not only within Chinese universities but in the whole of Chinese society. The official standard thought refers to the admiration of officials; likewise, being an official is considered as a matter of the utmost importance. The thoughts of leaders are top priority and thus lead to role dislocation within Chinese universities. According to Du, academia in Higher Education is characterised by its freedom and democracy whereas administrative power is characterised by its efficiency and restriction. As Du notes, the function of a university is to educate people and therefore academic members rather than administrative members should be the dominant decision-takers in university developments. The restricted power of academic members in Chinese Higher Education hinders the academic improvement of Chinese universities and also impedes teachers' creativity and initiative (Du, 2014).

Meanwhile, the leadership process in Chinese universities is vertical. According to Du (2014), the traditional leadership structure was established within the hierarchical system and presents as vertical levels: university-faculties-departments-courses. Within this vertical leadership structure, the function of leaders is to assign tasks and delegate responsibilities through a top-down approach. There is lack of horizontal communication because the duty of staff members is to finish their assigned tasks. This approach is efficient, but with problems. For example, power is more likely to be seized by only a few individuals. Du argues that, due to the hierarchical leadership approach, power is

centralised within positions of administrators and senior leaders. Therefore, both administrators and academic fellows pursue their career success by becoming official leaders rather than taking the supposed administrative and academic job duties. Besides this, the leader selection system is led by administrators. It is therefore more likely to select administrators rather than professional members with achievements to become leaders; this somehow weakens the academic power within Chinese universities (Du, 2014).

Rethinking Chinese leadership from both the theoretical and practical perspectives, Fang (2005) wrote that with the rapidly changing world, the Chinese hierarchical system may still protect the development of the heroic leadership model. Fang also considers that studies of leadership behaviour in China are more likely to focus on theoretical summaries and short-term reflections rather than longitudinal and practical research. Likewise, leaders are the main research objects whereas staff members and interactions are easy to be ignored. Fang (2005) claims that there should be more empirical studies about Chinese educational leadership. The situation detailed by Fang may have slightly improved, but has not been remarkably changed in Mainland China even in recent years (Lu, 2015). As an analytical approach of exploring leadership, distributed leadership offers a new angle for researching leadership in Chinese Higher education for domestic scholars and reformers.

2.9.2. Distributed Leadership in China

It is noted that influenced by the specific Chinese culture, distributed leadership exists in Chinese universities with its different developmental models and mechanisms (Lu, 2014). According to Liu (2010), the current leadership system in Chinese schools, the Principal Responsibility System under the Leadership of the Party Committee, is different from the leadership system in Western schools, and different leadership systems will point to different methods and models of distributed leadership (Liu, 2010). Although this statement is based on school contexts, it corresponds with Chinese Higher Education contexts and draws attention to the urgent need to research distributed leadership within the Chinese

university context. As Zhang (2013) claims, the concept of distributed leadership is not contrasted with the current leadership system in Chinese education. It is a developmental trend to shift leadership into a collective approach (Zhang, 2013).

According to Feng (2012), distributed leadership has been translated into Mandarin and introduced into Chinese society since 2004. Feng (2004) was the first person who systematically introduced distributed leadership into Mainland China. However, contrasted with its impact within Western societies and academia, distributed leadership was snubbed and got little attention in China (Feng, 2012). Feng (2012) speculates that one of the main reasons is that the term *distributed leadership* has not been theoretically and practically interpreted in Chinese education yet. According to Lu (2015) and Du (2014), there are few studies in Mainland China regarding distributed leadership, and those that can be found are mainly theoretical translation from Western books and journals. Additionally, there are even fewer empirical studies of distributed leadership in a Higher Education context (Du, 2014). Until 2017, there had been only four studies of distributed leadership in universities in Mainland China (Du, 2014; Lu, 2015; Zhao, 2015; Zhang, 2017) and only two of them are empirical (Lu, 2015, Zhao, 2015). The first distributed leadership study in Chinese Higher Education was conducted by Du (2014) in 2014 through documentary analysis. Although it is not an empirical study, Du was the first to combine theories of distributed leadership with the practical leadership model in Chinese universities.

Zhao (2015) conducted a large-scale study of distributed leadership in Chinese universities aiming to identify the development of distributed leadership in Chinese Higher Education. By utilising documentary analysis and a questionnaire survey, Zhao gathered questionnaires from 296 English language teachers in Chinese universities in different regions. His findings show that leadership in Chinese universities has been distributed to some extent. Zhao (2015) argued that distributed leadership is beneficial for organisational development and that there is an urgent need to change the organisational structure of Chinese universities, and the leaders' attitudes towards leadership and management. Although Zhao plays a pioneer role in researching distributed

leadership in the Chinese Higher Education sector, this study ignores the importance of both cultural and organisational contexts. The influence of Chinese culture was not examined; likewise, Zhao does not recognise that there are different organisational structures and cultures in different organisations. By making general conclusions based on respondents from universities in different regions of China, the research findings cannot represent any of the individual Higher Education institutions in China. Thus, instead of radically exploring the general picture of distributed leadership in Chinese universities, it is better to conduct a case study as a preliminary effort.

Jin (2015) carried out an empirical study of distributed leadership in three Chinese middle schools. The aim was to identify underlying problems, influence factors, and the solutions of distributed leadership in practice. Triangulation was achieved by utilising case studies, a questionnaire survey, interviews, documentary analysis, and observations. There were 20 interviewees in total, and questionnaire respondents included 3 school principals and 70 teachers from different positions. According to Jin, the study shows that distributed leadership has existed in Chinese middle schools, although the extent of distributed leadership may vary according to the different organisational situation. Jin claims that distributed leadership works well in researched Chinese schools. However, its practical effect is not obvious and "there is still a gap between *true* distributed leadership" (p. 27). Jin explains that, due to problems of the school organisational system and outdated concepts held by school heads and teachers, school principals have less consciousness of the need to distribute power and teachers have less enthusiasm for taking on leadership responsibilities (Jin, 2015).

In Taiwan, the first published study of distributed leadership was in 2008 (i.e. Lai, 2008) and until 2011, there were only 11 studies about distributed leadership in three years (Jiang, 2011). In 2016, by conducting an action research study of "distributed leadership and the construction of a democratic learning community" Ya-Hui, (2016, p. 90) was the first person to relate to distributed leadership with Taiwanese universities. The developmental process of distributed leadership in

Taiwan is more advanced than in Mainland China, as studies in Taiwan are both theoretical and empirical and have focused on the relationship between distributed leadership and different variables (influence factors such as gender, positions, school size, etc.). For example, Jiang (2011) carried out a large-scale empirical study of distributed leadership in sixty-one Taiwanese schools. By employing questionnaire surveys, Jiang proposes that the perception of distributed leadership in different genders, positions and sizes of schools are remarkably different. Meanwhile, Jiang also points out the positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' behaviour and job satisfaction. By using questionnaire surveys, Wang et al. (2011) identified more variables by carrying out another large-scale empirical distributed leadership study in Taiwanese schools. The aim was to identify the relationship between distributed leadership and innovation management (Wang et al., 2011). The study reveals more dependent variables that may have impact on distributed leadership; besides gender, position and school size, Wang et al. claim that distributed leadership in practice is also influenced by staff's age, tenure, educational backgrounds and school history. For example, Wang et al. indicate that distributed leadership is perceived highly evident amongst those staff members who are aged 40 to 50 or have around 20 years' tenure. Although the descriptions provided by Taiwanese studies may not correlate directly with the context of Mainland China, it provides a useful guide for domestic Chinese scholars to conduct more empirical studies and inspires them to conduct distributed leadership studies with variables.

In Hong Kong, the idea of distributed leadership has been promoted in the process for making curriculum decisions (Wan, Law and Chan, 2018). Wan et al.'s study is claimed as the latest research to identify distributed leadership "in a non-western context with a 'blended' culture of the traditional Chinese culture with the Western elements" (p. 108). Aiming to examine the perception of the extent of distributed leadership and the relationship between the extent of distributed leadership and the respondents' own roles, the researchers carried out the study in six primary schools through utilising the questionnaire survey. The findings address the importance of teachers' participation and indicate that the

high extent of distributed leadership is more likely to occur at the team level rather than at the school level. This study also points to the importance of socio-cultural contexts by revealing how distributed leadership is influenced by the different school contexts.

Law, Galton and Wan (2010) also carried out a distributed leadership study in a Hong Kong primary school. Aiming to identify the impact of teacher engagement in the process of curriculum decision-making and functions of distributed leadership, the researchers interviewed two teams of teachers in a Hong Kong primary school before and after the training sessions and achieved triangulation by also video-taping lessons and meetings. Respondents included trainee teachers in two teams, panel heads and team leaders. The findings show that, "the rotation of leadership or a form of distributed leadership to be shared by all members worked well with the teachers and was appropriate to the culture" (Law et al., 2010, p. 299). This again shows that distributed leadership exists and works well in China but with its distinct model. The cause, mechanism, interpretation and impact underneath its distinct model are what this study aims to examine.

2.10. Chapter Overview

This chapter has given an overview of literature from a Chinese perspective on distributed leadership. By respectively addressing the history, theoretical concepts, classifications, advantages and limitations of distributed leadership and distributed leadership in Chinese context, the author has drawn upon both theoretical and empirical literature in both schools and Higher Education contexts to help carry out the study and answer the research questions. The main points from the literature review which were used to provide a structure for analysing and discussing the findings may be summarised as:

1. Evidence for the existence of distributed leadership, in particular in terms of:
   (a) The incidence of interactions between those in formal and those in

informal roles rather than actions of formal leaders. (Spillane, 2012)

(b) The role of formal leaders in creating an appropriate atmosphere for distributed leadership in spite of the hierarchical nature of the organisation. (Harris, 2013, Gronn, 2008 cited in Tian et al., 2016, Duif et al. 2013).

(c) The willingness of staff to take on informal (and often unrewarded) leadership roles (Duif et al., 2013).

2. The ESHA seven dimensions of distributed leadership (ESHA, 2013)
3. The NCSL 'mechanisms of distributed leadership' (NCSL, 2004)
4. The existence of leadership development opportunities for staff and crucially:
5. The influence of Chinese societal culture on the distribution of leadership (e.g. Bush and Haiyan, 2000)

The major gaps in the literature which this study seeks to address in particular are the limited amount of literature relating to distributed leadership in higher education in general and, in particular, the dearth of literature regarding distributed leadership in China and the cultural implications involved.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents, explains and justifies the research methodology used in this study. It begins by introducing two categories of research paradigm - positivism and interpretivism, and three categories of research methods - qualitative method, quantitative method, and mixed methods. Secondly, the research approaches and research methods are explained. An explanation of the case study will be followed by the explanation of questionnaire surveys and interviews. Thirdly, the author then justifies the design and development of the questionnaires and interview schedules. Pilot studies are also described in this section. Fourthly, the section of sampling selection is followed by the section of authenticity, which includes validity, reliability, triangulation, and generalisability. After presenting the ethical aspects of this study, the researcher then explains the process of data collection and finishes the chapter with a section on the approach adopted to the analysis of the data collected.

3.2. Research Paradigm

Paradigm is defined by Somekh and Lewin (2005, p. 347) as "an approach to research which provides a unifying framework of understandings of knowledge, truth, values and the nature of being". According to Brundrett and Rhodes (2013), there are two categories of research paradigm - positivism and interpretivism. Positivism aims to discover the 'truth' and (dis)prove a hypothesis which is based upon theories and subject to empirical verification. Interpretivism on the other hand focuses on issues that relate to power and status such as culture, class, race, gender and politics; its aim is to examine the different perspectives of a phenomenon and to understand knowledge of relationships and human behaviours. Robson and McCartan (2016) note that quantitative research has historically been placed into the category of positivist paradigm, whereas the qualitative research paradigm is more likely to be linked to interpretivism.

It is noted that any research methodology is based upon its research questions; as Thomas (2011, p. 43) argues, "a piece of research is built around a question, it is not built around a method". Robson and McCartan (2016) also reiterate the importance of research questions when designing social research. They state that the choice of quantitative, qualitative and multi-strategy design is made according to the research aim and research questions. Likewise, the successful outcome of a research project is measured by an integration of research aim, research questions, methods and approaches (Thomas, 2017). The aim of this study is to examine the extent of distributed leadership and the factors which influence it in the Chinese Higher Education context. Based upon the seven research questions stated in Chapter 1, this research employs existing theoretical knowledge of distributed leadership to explore and interpret the underlying issues of the Chinese context (i.e. its mechanism, reasons, effects, and cultural and political influences), and therefore broadly follows interpretivism by utilising multiple-strategy design. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used within this study, through the use of mixed methods.

The qualitative research method is defined by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (1994, p. 6) as a research method which is:

> conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a 'lived' or life situation. These situations are typical, 'banal' or normal ones, reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies, and organisations.

Robson and McCartan (2016) wrote that, compared with quantitative methods, qualitative methods focus on meanings and contexts of social phenomena rather than the generalisability of findings. Words are seen as important; "Accounts and findings are presented verbally or in other non-numerical form" (p. 20). The qualitative research method has an inductive logic which means that theoretical concepts and ideas emerge from data collection. Gray presents the advantages of using qualitative methods (2013, p. 161):

> Qualitative research is highly contextual, being collected in a natural real life setting, often over long periods of time. Hence, it goes beyond giving a mere snapshot or cross-section of events and can show how and why things happen-also incorporating people's own motivation, emotions, prejudices and incidents of interpersonal cooperation and conflict.

Hibberts and Johnson (2012) also mention that the data in a qualitative paradigm can preserve the original language and meaning of participants. Researchers can carry out in-depth study through a qualitative research approach, describing changes, sequences, patterns and contexts of complex cases and phenomenon. However, the weakness of qualitative method research is that it is sometimes difficult to achieve generalisability and is therefore more likely to generate research bias than quantitative research. This issue can be offset by also using some quantitative methods in the research.

The quantitative method was viewed as more credible by politicians, administrators and other stakeholders (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012). As Robson and McCartan (2016) argue, it has a deductive logic, which means the theoretical concepts and ideas tested by the study are pre-existing. The advantage of this is that the theories can be validated and tested (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012). However, as Gray wrote, "statistical correlations may be based upon 'variables" that are arbitrarily defined by the researchers themselves" (2013, p. 161). The quantitative method is useful for carrying out large-scale studies, but this also means that research findings might be too general to apply to particular individuals, circumstances and contexts- in its very nature it has less contact with contexts and people. Fortunately, researchers have found a solution, offsetting the weakness of each paradigm by using mixed-methods. As it intends to deal with findings in both numerical and word form, this study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods.

This third main research approach, mixed methods, is defined as "the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve

the integration of data at one or more stages in the process of research" (Creswell and Clark, 2003, p. 212). Many scholars have justified the advantages of using mixed methods. Gray (2013) argues that one single research method is less likely to answer different research questions; multiple methods are helpful for a researcher to answer multiple research questions and gain a broader insight into the issue. Hibberts and Johnson (2012) believe that the overall research quality can be improved by using mixed methods and approaches. They further explain that mixed methods combine both quantitative and qualitative strategies, and can, at the same time, can take advantage of the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses of each paradigm. For example, "qualitative data can identify quantitative measurement problems. Quantitative sampling approaches can be used to increase the generalisability of qualitative results" (p. 126). Robson and McCartan (2016) agree with their statements, adding that mixed methods can also help enhance research validity and triangulation by establishing corroboration between both qualitative and quantitative data. Another advantage of mixed methods is that when unusual or unanticipated findings appear, the data and findings generated from one research approach can be explained and interpreted by the other approach. For example, the research methods of this study are a questionnaire survey followed by interviews. Any unanticipated questions arising from the questionnaires can be added into the interview schedules and further explored during the data collection process of the interviews.

3.3. Research Approaches and Research Methods

According to Brundrett and Rhodes (2013), research strategy is determined by the philosophical approach of the researcher. This research focuses on distributed leadership and its specific Chinese cultural influences at departmental level in a Chinese university; it also considers the differences of contextual settings between each department. Given that the contextual differences between four organisations need to be addressed, the overall research approach adopted in this study is the use of multiple cases studies in four different university departments. Each case study consists of mixed methods research, utilising censuses, a study

of all the members of a specific population, through questionnaire surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Each case study comprises questionnaire censuses of leaders and academic staff, plus interviews with samples of each (two questionnaire censuses plus two sets of interviews). An extra set of interviews was also designed for university leaders, aiming to address the research questions from their unique perspective.

A case study is defined as "an enquiry which uses multiple sources of evidence. It investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Johnson, 1994, p. 20). It was formerly seen as a method or methodology but has now evolved to be recognised as a research approach (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2012). Now a common research approach, the case study aims to understand the dynamic process within the research contexts (Gray, 2013). The strength of the case study approach is argued by Brundrett and Rhodes (2013, p. 57):

> A case study enables a unique example of real people in real situations that can be clearly understood because case study research enables the capture of the different viewpoints of individuals within the particular case studies.

When using multiple case studies, the researcher can also contrast and compare findings across cases (Somehk and Lewin, 2005). This approach correspondent with this study, which uses multiple case studies to compare the findings from four different university departments. The weakness of case studies is that generalisability is hard to achieve (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). In the case of this study, the use of questionnaire censuses in four case departments mean that research findings can be generalisable in some, although not all, of the Chinese contexts addressed.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012) note that a case study approach was previously used in the qualitative paradigm, which focuses on small groups of people and their practices, processes, relationships and contexts. Nowadays, by using it alongside with quantitative research methods (e.g. questionnaire survey),

case study has become a popular way to answer the questions arising from surveys. According to Bassey (1999) and Gray (2013), the several main methods that can be combined with case study research are documentary analysis, observation, interviews and questionnaires. Gray (2013) wrote that, compared with surveys which explore a much more focused range of subjects and themes but from many people, case studies focus on many topics but from a limited range of contexts, organisations and people. It is ideal to use case studies to answer the 'why' and 'how' questions of research, while survey research can be adopted when there are 'where', 'who' and 'what' questions. The research questions of this study include both 'what' and 'how' questions (e.g. by what mechanisms are leadership distributed? And how are leadership skills developed?). Therefore, both case study and within them, survey approaches are adopted.

As a research approach, survey or census has become one of the most popular quantitative approaches in educational leadership and management (Mujis, 2012). The reason for its popularity is that it is flexible, and makes it easy to gather large amounts of data from large numbers of respondents. This study is carried out in four different departments, and the total number of the sample (population) is 384. Questionnaire survey was therefore considered the easiest way to collect such high amounts of data from large numbers of people. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 169) define survey as follows:

> Surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events.

Borg and Gall (1996) state that the function of a survey is not limited to answering the 'what' question. In fact, there are a wide range of methods and instruments employed in survey research to explore comparisons, longitudinal changes, effects and relationships. Survey research provides a straightforward and simple approach to the study of motives, beliefs, values and attitudes

(Robson and McCartan, 2016). Mujis (2012) summarises three main strengths of survey research. Firstly, its flexibility enables it to provide answers to many kinds of research questions, including or particularly questions regarding regarding relationships, attitudes, opinions and quantities. For example, the survey adopted in this study covers seven different kinds of research questions. Secondly, compared with observation, survey research is more efficient as it costs less to collect the same amounts of data. Thirdly, the anonymity of respondents can be guaranteed. Besides, Robson and McCartan (2016) further add that survey can also help achieve research generalisability because of its standardisation of data. "Survey research is therefore particularly suited for canvassing opinions and feelings about particular issues. The use of standardised questions allows for easy comparability between respondents and groups of respondents" (Mujis, 2012, p. 141).

However, Mujis also points out the weakness of surveys. While they are suitable for gathering the opinions and perceptions of respondents, the information regarding respondents' behaviours that is gathered by surveys is usually self-reported and is therefore likely to be problematic and unreliable. As Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 248) explain, "data are affected by the characteristics of the respondents". The respondents may respond in a way that shows their 'good side' and may not relate their attitudes and beliefs accurately. Although the research data of this study is based upon the perceptions of respondents, the behaviours described by the respondents are tested by using three questionnaires surveys of different levels (university leaders, department leaders and staff). Mujis further claims that survey is not suitable to answer questions regarding in-depth meaning and processes. Limited by the depth and length of responses, it is also also hard to achieve a deep understanding of the contexts via a survey method. However, this issue can be offset by combination with qualitative research methods such as interviews.

Wyse, Selwyn, Smith and Suter make a distinction between survey and questionnaire, "the definition for 'survey' is the process of gathering information from many people whereas the definition for 'questionnaire' is the set of questions

we ask those people" (2016, p. 640). Questionnaire survey is adopted within this study as a main method of survey research, and is understood by Gray's definition: "questionnaires are research tools through which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order" (2013, p. 352). Questionnaire is a suitable approach when there are standardised questions and large numbers of population as it is a confidential, efficient, effective and rapid means of data collection (Gray, 2013, Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013).

The questionnaire has been considered one of the most popular research methods because of the benefits it brings for both researchers and respondents. According to Gray (2013), the standardised questions of a questionnaire are less likely to cause bias than interviews, and at the same time this method saves both time and money for the researcher. The questionnaire survey can also be utilised as a research method before interviews to help select interview respondents and find out undiscovered questions, as is done in this study. As Gray explains, "if we were able to follow up this response in an interview, we might ask what these values are, and how they actually manifest themselves in practice" (p. 353). For the respondents, there is greater flexibility as they can complete the questionnaires in their own time. Questionnaire can also assure the anonymity of respondents- "making the questionnaire anonymous can help create an atmosphere of trust and therefore lead perhaps to more truthful answers, thus increasing the reliability of the research" (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 93). However, Gray stresses that the researchers should also be aware that it can sometimes be hard to achieve the desired response rate via this method. Besides, the information received is more likely to be description than an in-depth explanation, and may be shallow and superficial because of the distance between respondents and researchers (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013).

Within this study, each case study consists of mixed methods research using a combination of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The reasonable existence of questionnaires within case studies in conjunction with interviews has been justified by Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012, p. 108):

> Questionnaires are often viewed as more suited to large-scale quantitative research, but they can actually work effectively within a case study in conjunction with interviews. Where the interview provides depth of understanding and insights into beliefs, attitudes and opinions, a questionnaire can give the researcher a broader understanding of a particular group or groups and this allows you to contextualize the work done with individuals.

After the data collection by questionnaire surveys or censuses, interviews are employed in this study. According to Gray (2013, p. 382):

> "An interview is a verbal exchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee. (The latter may be invited to talk about their own attitudes, beliefs, behaviours or experiences, as a citizen, consumer or employee)".

The interview type used in this study is semi-structured. Brundrett and Rhodes (2013, p. 80) explain that within semi-structured interviews "the interviewer has a series of predefined questions under main headings, but allows some degree of latitude in what is discussed". Semi-structured interviews are understood to be the most common kind of interviews in a mixed-method research (Coleman, 2012). It is non-standardised and enables respondents to explain and expand on their views and opinions (Gray, 2013).

As a flexible research technique, interviews can help collect many different kinds of information including personal histories and narratives, opinions, and factual data (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). Interviews can be used as the main research-gathering technique, as an initial approach to gather data on the general issues, or as a final research approach to enhance the researcher's understanding and verify the previous research (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013). Interview is adopted as the second research approach in this study, for the following reasons. Firstly, it can help achieve the research aim of this study and answer the research questions (Coleman, 2012). Secondly, Seidman (2006, p. 9) states that the choice

of interviews should be motivated by "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience", which is consistent with the prime research motivation of this study. Thirdly, Coleman goes on to state that interviews are suitable for researchers who need to rely on themselves and have limited time to carry out the research. By choosing interviews as a method, sole researchers are able to "gain relatively speedy insight into a particular problem or issue" (p. 251). Additionally, as Gray (2013) claims, interview is the most suitable approach when the "objective of the research is large exploratory" (p. 382) (i.e. the exploration of attitudes and feelings). It can also help researchers gain more detailed and deeper responses when the respondents are asked to further explain their statements during the interview process.

Cohen et al. (2000) wrote that interviews can be used for three main purposes. Firstly, interviews can serve the purpose of gathering information about people's attitudes, preferences, values and knowledge. Secondly, they can be used to examine variables and test hypotheses. Thirdly, they can also be utilised in conjunction with other research approaches and methods, such as questionnaire surveys, to confirm or follow up specific matters. The questionnaire method can be validated, and any unexpected responses from the questionnaires can be followed up effectively. For example, the questionnaire findings of this study reflect that most staff members in these four case departments state that they are willing to take on leadership responsibilities (Question No.5). However, the number of respondents who think that they are able to take on leadership responsibilities is notably lower. In consideration of the gap between these two sets of answers, this issue is followed up in interviews to identify the underlying reasons. Last but not least, Gray (2013, p. 383) adds that interviews "are also preferable to questionnaires where questions are either open-ended or complex, or where the logical order of questions is difficult to predetermine".

The unique value of interviews lies in the benefits that the method brings for researchers. By using interviews, population triangulation can be achieved and the research reliability can be increased (Edwards, 2014). According to Borg and

Gall (1996), the direct verbal interaction of interviews between researchers and interviewees is beneficial for researchers in that it allows them to efficiently get the necessary information and follow up noteworthy responses. By engaging with the respondents face-to-face, researchers are able to discover more answers by observing the verbal tones and body language of the interviewees (Gray, 2013). Borg and Gall go on to state that, compared with questionnaires which are not able to generate immediate feedback, interviews have the advantages of adaptability and enabling clarity to be more easily achieved. However, "the flexibility, adaptability, and human interaction that are unique strengths of the interview also allow subjectivity and possible bias that in some research situations are its greatest weakness" (p. 437). The lack of standardisation may also have a negative impact on reliability (Robson and McCartan, 2016). For researchers, conducting interviews can be time consuming as it is arduous and exhausted to transcribe, code, and interpret interviews (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). Coleman (2012) asserts that, instead of relying too much on interviewing leaders, researchers in educational leadership should also get other stakeholders involved and consider the use of other research tools to validate and complement interview data. This view is correspondent with this study which adopts both interviews and other research tools; both leaders and academic staff are interviewed.

3.4. Design and Development of the Instruments

3.4.1. Questionnaires

The design of the questionnaires is based upon the literature review, research aim, and the research questions. There are respectively two kinds of questionnaires (see Appendix. 1.); one is for leaders, and another is for academic staff. Within this study, 'leaders' include (Associate) Head of Department, (Associate) Party Branch Secretary, and department/course leaders. 'Academic staff' refers to professors, associate professors, and teaching fellows. The content of two questionnaires is the same apart from Question 1, which asks respondents to tick

their job position; this allows the researcher to classify respondents into leaders and staff. In all, the questionnaire includes twelve questions, the order of which is consistent with the order of research questions. Some of the options have four scales for respondents to tick, comprising ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’. Within some of the questions, respondents are also able to insert their own specific responses (Questions 6, 8, 9, and 10). Question 11 asks whether the respondents are willing to participate in interviews; this helps the researcher to select potential interviewees. All the questions are multiple choices except Question 12, which asks the respondents to provide feedback and suggestions for improving the questionnaires. Each questionnaire takes around 15 minutes to complete. Requests for personal information and the use of complicated questions are avoided. In consideration of the potential misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the phase ‘distributed leadership’, an explanation of the term is attached to the questionnaires. All the leaders and academic staff within the four case departments received the questionnaires, which could be completed by hand.

As Brundrett and Rhodes wrote, “piloting is useful in gaining assurance about the clarity and the utility of the questions and the instructions given, the appropriateness of their length, and that the completed pilots really do offer responses that are appropriate to the purpose of the research” (2013, p. 68). The main function of a pilot study is to increase the practicability, validity and reliability of the questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2000). The questionnaires for this study were piloted in the Department of Materials at Q University at the end of March 2016; this department is not one of the four case departments included in this study, but has a similar organisational structure to those four. 17 formal leaders and 23 academic staff participated in the pilot study. The pilot study shows that, although some of the respondents had not understood the term ‘distributed leadership’ until this study, although leadership had been to some extent distributed in this department. By suggesting that distributed leadership was already existent in this Chinese context, the questionnaire findings of the pilot study provided a precondition for the formal research. The pilot study also provided guidance to the researchers in revising and adjusting the questions in

both questionnaires and interviews. Confusing questions were deleted, and several words were changed to avoid repetition and ambiguity. For example, in the previous questionnaire for leaders, the three options of Question 1 were leaders, administrators, and department/course leaders. The term 'administrators' in China refers specifically to the office directors and secretary of the Youth League Committee. The pilot study helped the researcher to make a distinction between leaders and managers, and to realise that only the academic members of departments should be involved in the study. The option of administrators, therefore, was deleted from the questionnaires. Meanwhile, the option of 'leaders' was expanded into respectively A. (Associate) Head of the Department and B. (Associate) Party Branch Secretary. This helps to make a distinction between academic powers and political powers within departments.

3.4.2. Interviews

The interviews are semi-structured with prompts for the researcher. The design of the interview schedules is also based upon the literature review, research aim and the research questions. There are three interview schedules (see Appendix. 2); these are respectively prepared for department leaders, academic staff and university leaders. The content of the three interviews is different; the questions are asked in different ways but with similar themes. For example, a question in the leaders' interview schedule, 'If there are staff who want to take on additional projects and roles, how does that benefit the department', is replaced with 'what benefits can you bring to your department if you take on leadership responsibilities' in the staff's interview schedule. Consistent with the research questions, the questions in each interview schedule are categorised into five separate sections including formal positions and responsibility descriptions, department situations, the benefits and barriers of distributed leadership, leadership skills, and Chinese culture. Interview sessions with leaders lasted around 35-45 minutes on average, and those with academic staff lasted around 25-30 minutes in average.

The interview pilot was carried out at the Department of Materials in mid-April

2016, after the pilot of questionnaires. Two interview schedules were prepared for department leaders and staff. The interviewees included two leaders and three staff. In order to save the time and money required by traveling, the interview pilot was conducted by telephone. Coleman (2012, p. 254) claims that telephone interviewing is the most suitable means when the geographical distance makes face-to-face interview impossible to achieve. It helps save both travel time and money for researchers, and is also beneficial to interviewees in allowing them to readily fit the interview into a busy schedule. Compared with a face-to-face interview, respondents may feel it to be less intrusive as "the relative anonymity of the exchange could encourage a more open dialogue than in a face-to-face meeting" (p. 254). However, as Brundrett and Rhodes (2013, p. 79) state, telephone interview is "generally easy to arrange and very convenient, but does not allow for the observation of physical cues and mannerisms". Therefore, within this study, the telephone interview was only adopted for the pilot study. The questions were asked in order during each interview, but any latter questions which had already been answered would be skipped. The interview pilot went well and showed that most of the questions in the interview schedule could be answered properly by participants. Only a few minor corrections were made to the questions. For example, when teaching staff were asked about the organisational structure of the department, respondents found it hard to summarise their response to the previous question in section 2. (e) (see Appendix. 2), 'what formal structures in this department provide you with the opportunities to participate in departmental decision-making'. This question was therefore rephrased, 'are there any regular meetings, teaching groups etc. in your department that provide you with the opportunity to participate decision-making?'. After the pilot, the question about the relationship between distributed leadership and student performance was also added into the interview schedules.

3.5. Sampling Selection

The study was carried out in Q University in China. There are two main reasons for selecting this university. Firstly, its convenience as a research base - the

researcher's family connections made the agreement to participate more likely in the subject university than in other Chinese universities. The researcher was aware of the danger of research bias due to this family connection, albeit only in one of the departments, and took every possible care to avoid or, at least minimise this risk by ensuring that all respondents were treated in exactly the same manner and that no reference was made to any personal connections to the university. Secondly, in order to ensure the successful completion of the research process, it was essential to guarantee that distributed leadership had existed within the researching context before further identifying its mechanisms, effects etc. A previous research project carried out in the Department CE in Q University by this researcher showed that distributed leadership has existed in the university context. By expanding into four case departments, this study is based upon the researcher's previous study and aims to explore the issue more widely and in greater depth. The re-selection of this university helps improve both the validity and reliability of the research.

In keeping with other Chinese comprehensive universities, Q University covers the disciplines of arts, humanities, social science, business, life science etc. The university has also been chosen partly because of the differences between departments. The four departments chosen for this study are the Department CE, Department MP, Department EM, and Department FL. Department CE is the leading department of this university, and is well developed due to its high quality scientific research. Due to the nature of research in general, it may be assumed that the atmosphere of this department is more likely to be cooperative and autonomic. Both the Department MP and the Department FL are pedagogical departments. This means that the main focus of these departments is to provide high quality teaching. As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, more than 30 academic staff within the Department EM also have other jobs in companies and societies. It may be assumed that the organisational culture in this department may be more loose and distant than in the other three departments. Amongst these four case departments, they all set both teaching and researching as their development goals, but to highly varied degrees and with different emphases. This motivated the researcher to choose this university and these four

departments over and above others. Another reason for the choice is that these four departments sit respectively in the disciplines of science, engineering, liberal arts, and business, and will therefore have different department cultures.

It should be mentioned at this juncture that, at the outset, the science department chosen for participation in this study was originally the Department of Chemistry rather than the Department MP. However, the Head of the Department finally decided not to participate in this study due to the estrangement amongst organisational members and his unstable leadership position at that point in time. Thus, the Department of Chemistry was finally replaced for the purpose of this study by the Department MP.

According to Borg and Gall (1996, p. 240), sampling means "selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population". Gray (2013) wrote that the selection of sampling is based on the representative of characteristics of the population: "Confidence in the representative nature of a sample makes it possible to make inferences from the results to the larger population" (p. 209). Within this study, a censuses by questionnaires is employed; therefore, the population and sampling of the questionnaires are the same. All the academic members within each department are invited to participate in the questionnaire surveys.

Purposive sampling is employed in the interview method, as the interview respondents of this study are selected according to the questionnaire results. As Gray (2013, p. 217) explains:

> Purposive samples are used when particular people, events or settings are chosen because they are known to provide important information that could not be gained from other sampling designs. In this kind of approach, the researcher exercises a degree of judgement about who will provide the best perspectives on the phenomenon of interest and then invites these participants into the study.

As mentioned earlier, Question 11 in the questionnaires asked whether the respondents were willing to participate in interviews. The respondents who ticked the 'yes' option for this question were primarily selected as a group of potential interviewees. The researcher then made the final decisions based on their questionnaire responses. Within purposive sampling, the selection of sampling is based on the judgement and interest of the researcher (Robson and McCartan, 2016). For example, in this study, the leader who specifies in the questionnaires that there was no need to improve staff members' leadership skills in the questionnaire was invited to participate in interview for further clarification.

3.6. Authenticity

It is important to ensure the authenticity and quality of research in educational leadership and management because it can not only help researchers in examining their research methodology and approach, but also help them in examining the quality of studies carried out by other researchers (Bush, 2012). The authenticity of research can be judged by the process of addressing reliability and validity, and through triangulation. The relationship of these concepts is asserted by Bush: "reliability and validity are the two main issues to address when seeking to ensure authenticity while triangulation is one important way in which validity may be sought" (p. 86). Brock-Utne (1996) states that they have equally important positions in both qualitative and quantitative research, although they may sometimes be treated differently by different researchers. Although it is necessary to employ different methods of achieving research authenticity, the proper attitude towards the issues of reliability and validity has been argued by Cohen et al.: "it is unwise to think that the threats to validity and the reliability can ever be erased completely; rather, the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a pierce of research" (2000, p. 105). The concepts of reliability, validity and triangulations and the means of achieving them in this study will be respectively explained in detail below.

3.6.1. Reliability

Reliability, as defined by Hartas (2010, p. 71), "refers to the consistency and stability of a measurement, and is concerned with whether the results of a study are replicable". Reliability is seen as a synonym for the replicability and consistency of results over respondents, over instruments, and over time (Cohen et al., 2000). Considering that the replicability of findings indicates a high level of reliability, Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) wrote that the research reliability can be achieved by using a second method within a study, such as questionnaires or interviews, with the same respondents in the same conditions and contexts. The same or similar findings produced by the second method would demonstrate a high level of reliability. This study follows this advice, utilising mixed methods within the same context. The interview respondents were selected from the respondents of questionnaires; the overlapping findings of the two research instruments indicate a good level of reliability.

As regards reliability in survey research, Bush (2012) argues that the predominant means of achieving reliability is through a 'test-retest' process; "a reliable instrument should give more or less the same results each time it is used with the same person or group" (p. 77). Youngman (1994) suggests three ways to secure the reliability of questionnaires response data. According to him, the findings can be compared with a pilot study and other sources such as school records. Researchers can also ask the respondents directly to check whether the answers match with their previous responses. In addition to the use of mixed methods, the reliability of questionnaires and interview data in this study is also achieved by carrying out a pilot study, the results of which match with the findings of the formal study. The interview transcripts for the formal study were also sent back to 'retest' whether the respondents agree with their previous responses. None of the respondents gave a negative feedback.

The reliability of data recorded from interviews is comparatively tricky as Fowler (2003) claims that, to ensure the reliability of the interview procedure, the researcher needs to ask the same questions in the same way to the same

respondents. This can only be achieved in structured interviews. However, Bush (2012) states that the reliability of semi-structured interviews can be compromised as this particular requirement of reliability, standardisation, will decrease the research validity. “Validity is likely to require a friendly, human approach that allows respondents to answer in their own way, expressing their thoughts and feelings, and not to be restricted to the artificiality of a standard instrument” (p. 78). Within semi-structured interviews, each interviewee is seen as a unique respondent and is able to answer in their own way. During the interview process, probing and prompting in the semi-structured interviews will also add variance to each interview schedule (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013). All of these will lessen the results’ reliability. Bush (2012, p. 79) also addresses that “the increasing recognition that each school provides a distinctive context for practising school leadership increases the difficulties involved in seeking reliability in interview research”. Bush goes on to state that in this research dimension, research reliability may be unattainable but may in fact be undesirable. As Hartas (2010) claims that the research’s validity is more important than its reliability, as it is worthless to carry out an invalid research even if the study is reliable.

3.6.2. Validity and Generalisability

The relationship between reliability and validity is summarised by Cohen et al. (2000, p. 105): “reliability is a necessary but insufficient condition for validity in research; reliability is a necessary precondition of validity”. Reliability focuses on consistency within the findings, while validity focuses on the generalisability and accuracy of the research (William, 2009). According to Hartas (2010, p. 451), validity is “a criterion for the integrity of a study in terms of an accuracy of inferences and the trustworthiness of results”. The aim of validity is to establish the trustfulness and credibility of the research (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013). As an important element of effective research, validity must be achieved in both quantitative and qualitative research. Brundrett and Rhodes (2013, p. 29) introduces a way of improving research validity:

> using a variety of respondents drawn from a single group (e.g. heads from different schools) or more than one respondent group (e.g. heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers from a single school) in order to gain additional perspectives on a particular issue may be seen as helpful in enhancing validity.

This is the approach taken by this study which has three different interview schedules for respondents from different role levels (university leaders, department leaders, and staff). The respondents in the leaders' category, for example, include (Associate) Head of the Department, (Associate) Party Branch Secretary and department/course leaders. This variety helps the researcher understand the answers from the perspectives of people in varying positions, which helps to achieve validity.

Both Bush (2012) and William (2009) have written that there are two types of validity, internal validity and external validity. Bush (2012) explains that internal validity refers to "the extent that research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 82). Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) wrote that internal validity can be enhanced through triangulation and pilot study. In qualitative research, the usual means of achieving internal validity is through triangulation and the objective judgement of the researcher, whereas in quantitative research, researchers can enhance the research validity by selecting a good sampling and doing a proper analysis.

Gray (2013) mentions that there are two main barriers to validity in questionnaires - the issue of non-response, and the degree of accuracy of questionnaire responses. The problem of non-response can be solved by follow-up interviews; researchers can choose to interview those people who do not give questionnaire responses. The interview responses can then be compared with questionnaire responses to check whether the two sets of respondents are consistent and similar. This study adopts this method in part, in that it interviews two university leaders who are not questionnaire respondents. Alternatively, instead of the people who do not give questionnaire responses, the sample of

interviewees can be limited to questionnaire respondents only. In this way, response accuracy can also be checked in the interview process, determining "how carefully they have answered the questionnaire" (p. 375). This study follows this approach as well, enhancing the research validity by further checking questionnaire responses through interviewing the respondents. The main threat to interview validity is bias (Cohen et al., 2000), defined as, "a systematic or persistent tendency to make errors in the same direction, that is, to overstate or understate the 'true value' of an attribute" (Lansing, Ginsberg and braaten, 1961 cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 120). Bush (2012) notes that the issue of bias can be alleviated through 'respondent validity' (p. 83), whereby the written notes of researchers and transcripts can be returned to the interview respondents for amendment and confirmation. In this study, the transcripts were sent back to the interview respondents for confirmation or amendment.

Internal validity pertains to the accuracy of the research focus whereas external validity refers to its generalisability in relation to other settings (William, 2009). According to Bush (2013, p. 83), external validity is "the extent that findings may be generalised to the wider population, which the sample represents, or to other similar settings". Brock-Utne (1996) wrote that external validity is more likely to be applied in a positivist study. It is critical to discuss external validity in relation to qualitative research because case study, for example, "does not match the survey approach in terms of generalisation" (Bush, 2012, p. 83). Each case is unique and may therefore limit the research generalisability. Even though, Bassey (1999) states that the issue of generalisation may be less ambiguous when researchers undertake several similar case studies. By repeating a case study in another, comparable context, problems regarding generalisability can be alleviated and minimised (Bush, 2012). By adopting multiple cases studies in four university departments, the research findings of this study are more generalisable in certain Chinese contexts, but less generalisable in some other contexts.

3.6.3. Triangulation

A detailed definition of triangulation has been provided by Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 233):

> Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour… The use of multiple methods, or the multi-method approach, as it is sometimes called, contrasts with the ubiquitous but generally more valuable single-method approach that characterises so much of research in the social sciences… triangular techniques in the social sciences attempts to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint.

According to Bush (2012), triangulation is a way of helping to improve validity through checking data. It can be achieved by either inviting a range of respondents or by employing mixed methods. Atkins and Wallace (2012) go on to state that mixed methods enable researchers to cross-check the "convergence of evidence" (p. 111) and compare the research findings. Triangulation can be used in either interpretive or positivist research, and it becomes more valuable in case studies carried out through mixed methods (Cohen et al., 2000).

According to Scott (2007), there are mainly four kinds of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation refers to a process wherein "different data sets are collected at different time" (p. 85); respondent triangulation is a type of data triangulation. Investigator triangulation is where "more than one data collector/analyst is used to confirm or disconfirm the findings of the research" (p. 85). Theoretical triangulation means that there is more than one theory at play within data interpretation. Methodological triangulation is where "strategies or methods are mixed to corroborate one against the other" (p. 85). According to Cohen et al. (2000, p. 115), methodological triangulation has become the "one used most frequently and the one that possibly has the most to offer". Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) argue that there are also two kinds of methodological triangulation, within-method and

cross-method. For the within-method approach, the same research method is utilised on different occasions within the same body of research, whereas within the cross-method approach, mixed methods are employed in a single piece of overall research. Cohen et al. (2000) develop their own triangulation theory by expanding the Scott's data triangulation into time triangulation (data gathered at different times), space triangulation (data gathered in different places) and combined levels of triangulation (i.e. societal, organisational, group and individual level). This study adopts methodological triangulation by using multiple research approaches and methods. Additionally, population triangulation has also been utilised by involving both leaders and staff, and triangulation is also achieved by carrying out data collection in four different departments.

3.7. Ethics

It is important to adhere to specific moral principles when carrying out research. This relates to the issue of research ethics,

> A matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature. (Cavan, 1977, p. 810)

Gray (2013) summarises four ethical principles to guide the research which is to do with interactions with people and organisations. Firstly, any potential harm to participants should be avoided. This refers not only to physical damage but also psychological harm such as embarrassment, stress and anxiety. Secondly, the researchers should ensure the informed consent of respondents. Thirdly, the privacy of participants should be respected: "Interviewees have the right not to answer individual questions or to terminate the interview before its completion" (p. 406). Last but not least, the use of deception must be avoided.

This study has ensured its ethical conduct based upon the statement of Gray and

by following the BERA ethical research guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011). As Atkins and Wallace (2012) address the importance of following the ethical requirements of the department in which the researcher works; the researcher firstly needs to get permission via an ethics approval form from the researcher's university's department. The approval form should comply with the following rules:

> The association takes voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway. Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged… (BERA, 2011, p. 7)

Before collecting data in this study, the researcher had submitted an Application for Ethical Approval Form (see Appendix. 4.) to the Centre for Education Studies at The University of Warwick. The form lists the information of participants, and details the required approach regarding respect for participants' rights and dignity, privacy and confidentiality, consent, protection of participants and child protection. This form was completed in and signed by the researcher and then approved by the course supervisors and the department coordinators. It addresses the issues of protecting participants and their confidentiality, and helps to ensure the research is followed by the ethical rules.

Within this study, an invitation letter including an informed consent form was attached to each questionnaire. Neither the questionnaires nor interviews were carried out until the respondents had signed and returned the voluntarily consent form. The invitation letter gave a brief introduction of the research aim and listed the funding institutions of this study. This study is jointly funded by the University of Warwick and The China Scholarship Council. According to BERA (2011), the sponsor information should be included out of courtesy. The invitation letter also offers a guarantee for the participants regarding their confidentiality and anonymity, as defined by Bell and Woolner (2012, p. 275): "confidentiality is a promise that you will not be identified or presented in

identifiable form, while anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondent". Additionally, the contact information of the researcher is also provided. The participants were invited to read the information and signed the letter before completing the questionnaires.

A protocol document was also attached with the interview schedules for interviewees, to ensure confidentiality. It included the following information:

- Participants are asked to give their informed consent to the interview.
- They are assured that confidentiality will be maintained because neither their names, nor that of their department will not be used in the thesis
- They are assured that they will have the opportunity to see, and to correct, the record of the interview.
- They are assured that only their approved version of the interview will be used in the thesis, and then only on an anonymous basis.

This protocol was offered for participants to read before the interviews, and participants were informed that all the research data would be kept confidential and would only be used for the thesis. Respondents were also told that they had the right to withdraw from the study during any time. For example, according to the questionnaire results, an academic staff member from the Department FL expressed his willingness to participate in the follow-up interview. Unfortunately, when he was contacted by the researcher via telephone two months later, he had changed his mind due to his personal concerns and refused to be interviewed. The researcher respected his decision and thus selected another interviewee.

3.8. The Subject University and Departments

The study was carried out in Q University (a pseudonym) in China. From the *historical and geographical* perspectives, Q is a university located on the east coast of China in Shandong province. As the hometown of Confucius, the region is deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture and the 1978 reform and opening-up policy which brought dramatic changes to Chinese society. The aim

of promoting the economy and improving communications helped these east coastal regions develop a rapidly growing economy within a globalized context. However, considering that the cultural difference in different Chinese regions cause diversities, research findings of this study may be atypical of other Higher Education institutions. The deep influence of traditional Chinese culture within this region, for example, Confucianism, may limit the generalisability of the findings.

From the *organisational* perspective, Q is a Chinese Comprehensive Research University originally established upon chemical-engineering subjects (QUT, 2015). Affiliated and funded by the local government, it has nineteen departments covering alternative disciplines of arts, humanities, social science, business, and life science etc. The wide variety of departments and subjects provide opportunities for researchers to conduct the research in departments with different cultures. There are around 2100 teaching and administrative staff in total within the university. Among hundreds of Chinese universities, Q ranks as 119th of 794 Chinese universities in 2015 (QUT, 2015). The subjects of Chemistry, Material Science and Engineering are in top 1% of Essential Science Indicators (ESI). The scientific achievements and qualities of teaching can also be reflected from the evaluation rewards such as 'outstanding university for its undergraduate education', 'national top university in its practice of the employment of graduates' and 'Huangpu Military Academy of China Rubber Industry' (QUT, 2012).

Besides the teaching and researching quality, this university has wide communication and cooperation with societies and companies. Academic members are encouraged to conduct their own research, projects and make their own companies. As one of the shareholders, the university nowadays has owned 7 public companies; for example, MESNAC Company, an international group company which is committed to industrial software application and information equipment, is one of them (QUT, 2015). Furthermore, this university also pays much attention to the international communication and exchange by signing the agreements with 106 universities around the world (QUT, 2012). Both students

and academic members of this university have opportunities to go abroad for exchange and academic visit.

The four case departments are the Department of Chemical-Engineering (CE), the Department of Maths and Physics (MP), the Department of Economic Management (EM) and the Department of Foreign Languages (FL) respectively. Throughout this research, they have been referred as the Departments CE, MP, EM and FL respectively, for simplicity and clarity when referring to specific departments. Department CE is one of the earliest established departments within this university (QUT, 2017). As the leading department in this university, it has 118 academic staff in total and is slightly stronger and advanced than other departments. The quality of the scientific research in this department is the highest. The Department MP has 81 academic staff in total. It is a pedagogical department taking responsible of fundamental maths and physics courses to every science student. Besides basic teaching functions, this department also pays attention to academic competitions including modelling and innovation competitions. The Department EM is a business department and has 80 academic staff in total (administrators are exclusive). The uniqueness of this department is that above 30 staff members have other job titles in companies. As another pedagogical department, the Department FL provides both professional language courses for major students and Basic English for students from other subjects. Among 105 academic staff members, 57 of them have overseas experiences (QUT, 2017).

3.9. The Data Collection Process

The procedure for data collection was to firstly choose the four case departments. Once the research departments were selected, censuses by questionnaire were carried out within each department in early September 2016. On the basis of the questionnaire analysis, potential interview respondents were selected (e.g. Question 11: would you be willing to participate in an interview of approximately 30 minutes). Respondents' age and gender were also taken into consideration in choosing the final interview respondents. Interviews were

conducted from mid-October and finished at the end of November 2016. Once the interviews were conducted, the researcher then made transcriptions, translated the interviews, and returned the notes and transcription to each respondent for confirmation or alteration if necessary. In the event no changes were made by respondents.

After the pilot study, questionnaires were distributed to all the leaders and academic staff in the four case departments in early September 2016. The new term had just started in Chinese universities and everyone was back from holiday, making it more likely that the researcher would gain a higher response rate. This was important, as Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) argue that response rate is an important guarantee for research trustworthiness; a low response rate is also more likely to cause research bias. Robson and McCartan (2016) comment that the agreement has not yet been reached on what exact number is an adequate response rate; Thus, minimum response rates ranging from 60% to 75% are all seen as acceptable. An accessible and well-presented questionnaire may help to get a higher response rate (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013). Researchers can also enhance the response rate by stressing the benefits and importance of questionnaires, and multiple rounds of following up to request completion (Cohen et al., 2000).

Because this study has adopted a questionnaire census or survey, questionnaires were all handed out face to face to ensure a better response rate. This did help to get more questionnaires back. The gender balance of respondents was consistent with actual staff members within each department. The total number of sampled respondents (population) in the Department CE is 118; 108 respondents completed the questionnaires. There are 81 leaders and academic staff in total in the Department MP; 78 of them responded to the questionnaires. From the Department of EM, 71 of 80 members participated in the questionnaire survey. The current (at the time) population in the Department FL was 105; 81 questionnaires came back. Therefore, the response rates of the Department CE, the Department MP, the Department EM and the Department FL were respectively 91.53%, 96.3%, 88.75% and 77.14%.

After the data collection from the questionnaire surveys was completed at the end of September 2016, the questionnaires were analysed briefly to help revise interview schedules and select potential interviewees. The interviews were then carried out from mid-October and finished at the end of November 2016. The interviews were conducted face-to-face. According to Brundrett and Rhodes (2013, p. 79), "face-to-face interviews are considered the best approach wherever possible because the interviewer can interact with the interviewee and note their full response, including their tone of voice, manner, body language, and so forth". The interviews were recorded via note taking and sound recording (over the phone); recording and note taking are the two main methods of saving the interview data (Borg and Gall, 1996). According to Gray (2013), taking notes can also help the researcher to formulate new questions as it allows them to readily locate useful quotations for later analysis. The interviewees can pace their response speeds, and receive a visual clue as to whether they are providing important information, through observing this non-verbal behaviour. The advantages of making an interview recording is noted by Borg and Gall (1996, p. 445),

> It reduces the tendency of the interviewer to make an unconscious selection of data favouring his bias. The recorded data can be played back more than once and can be studied much more thoroughly than would be the case if data were limited to notes taken during the interview.

After interviewing, the transcripts were sent back to the respondents for confirmation; none of them requested for any changes or gave negative feedback. The process of data collection was then formally finished. The proportion of interviewees from each role category is roughly in proportion with the sampling. There are 12 interviewees in total in the Department CE, 3 of whom are leaders. In the Department MP, there are 3 leaders and 6 staff who participated in the interviews. Of 9 interviewees in the Department EM, 2 of them are leaders. As for the Department FL, there were 10 interviewees in total. Of the three leaders included in this number, one of the respondents is the only Party Branch

Secretary who participated in this study across the four case departments.

3.10. Analysis Approaches

The main rationale for selecting a certain software program when analysing data should be how helpful the tool is and whether it can help improve and enhance data analysis (Wyse et al., 2016). With the aim of achieving concise and simple research findings, the quantitative data of this study was analysed by using Microsoft Excel. As Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012) state that Excel is a suitable tool when there is a quantitative component in a case study. Within the Excel spreadsheet, tables were created to present the questionnaire findings, with one row for respondents, and another row for the options of the questions. The quantitative analysis of this study has employed a descriptive focus. As Gray (2013, p. 566) defines, a descriptive focus "involves the creation of a summary picture of a sample or population in terms of key variables being researched". As well as analysing data by using descriptive statistics, a descriptive focus also includes presenting data in graphical form (Gray, 2013), as is done in this study. The main aim of using a descriptive focus is to "describe the characteristics of a particular set of observations without explicit generalization to a larger sample" (Jose and Szabo, 2016, p. 733). It can help to "facilitate the search for patterns in data, simplify the communication of quantitative research results, and allow for the accumulation of a broad body of research across domains" (Steedle, 2016, p. 711). This approach is beneficial in facilitating practical interpretation of research findings, and making them more easily understood by the non-technical general public, policy makers and educators.

For the analysis of the qualitative portion of this study, a content analysis (thematic analysis) method was adopted, wherein key themes were identified based on both the literature review and interview transcripts. Interview data were coded and labelled; the researcher then selected the interview quotes that related to the specified themes and categorised them accordingly. Content analysis analyses and identifies themes of qualitative data by using both an *inductive* approach and a *deductive* approach (Gray, 2013); "through the inductive

approach, the researcher attempts to make meaning from the data without the influence of preconceived notions that may be generated from personal biases, the existing literature on the topic under study or even theoretical lenses" (Kawulich, 2016, p. 771). The deductive approach, on the other hand, "uses a theory to generate a working hypothesis concerning relationships between variables" (Gray, 2013, p. 37). As a bottom-up method, the inductive approach is suitable for researchers to describe or explore a phenomenon within single cases; a deductive approach is top-down and works well when the researchers know the settings well and aims to explain and confirm the phenomenon. These two methods are not mutually exclusive. Considering that the meaning from the qualitative data of this study is moveable and generated from both the existing theoretical framework and data itself, a thematic approach is utilised. Within thematic analysis, researchers "move back and forth between concretes bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 772). As Robson and McCartan (2016) discuss, the flexibility of content analysis means it can be used with any types of qualitative data. It can be also quick and easy to use and learn and can help to summarise "key features of large amounts of qualitative data" (p. 470).

3.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology employed in this study. The content respectively includes research paradigm, research approaches and research methods, design and development of the questionnaires and interviews, sampling collection, authenticity, ethics, and the process of data collection. In the end, the researcher explains the approaches to analysis used in this study which underpin the findings presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents both questionnaire and interview findings from the department leaders, staff members, and university leaders who took part in case studies in the four university departments. The findings from each department will be presented separately.

4.2. The Department CE

4.2.1. Questionnaire Findings

Respondents' Basic Information

Table 4.1 Details of the respondents and department members

Categories		Numbers
Leaders	(Associate) Heads of the Department	3
	(Associate) Party Branch Secretary	1
	Department/ Course Leaders	24
	Total	28
Staff	Professors	9
	Associate Professors	32
	Teaching Fellows	39
	Total	80
Number of Respondents		108
Number of staff members in the Department (excluding Administrators)		118
Response rate (%)		91.53%

The Conceptual Recognition of Distributed Leadership

Two questions - Questions 2 and 3 - examined the conceptual recognition of distributed leadership. Question 2 asked the respondents to what extent were they aware of the term 'distributed leadership'. Question 3 then provided three conceptual descriptions of distributed leadership to see how they felt it was best defined. Option A stated that 'leadership responsibilities are shared within the department'; option B stated that '*interactions* between leader and teacher, rather than only workload delegation, are important', and option C stated that formal leaders are not the only leaders, but teachers are also informal leaders. Respondents were asked to tick one value – 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree', or 'strongly agree' for each option.

Question 2

Table 4.2 The extent to which 'distributed leadership' is a known concept

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	15	7	6	0	28
Staff	40	23	16	1	80
Total	55	30	22	1	108
Rate (%)	50.9%	27.8%	20.4%	0.9%	100%

Amongst the 108 respondents, the responses showed that the majority were not aware of distributed leadership at all. Some respondents recognised the term to a small extent, whereas some respondents said they were aware of distributed leadership but only to some extent. Only one staff member said they recognised the term to a great extent.

Question 3

Table 4. 3 The conceptual understanding of the term ‘distributed leadership’

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
A. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the department	Strong disagree	1	0	1	0.9%
	Disagree	5	16	21	19.4%
	Agree	20	55	75	69.5%
	Strongly agree	2	9	11	10.2%
B. Interactions between leader and the teacher, rather than workload delegation only, are important	Strong disagree	1	1	2	1.9%
	Disagree	0	3	3	2.8%
	Agree	19	51	70	64.8%
	Strongly agree	8	25	33	30.5%
C. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders; teachers are also involved in leadership practices such as decision-making	Strong disagree	0	1	1	0.9%
	Disagree	4	4	8	7.4%
	Agree	19	62	81	75%
	Strongly agree	5	13	18	16.7%
Total respondents		28	80	108	100%

The Table above reveals that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the listed conceptual descriptions, showing a good understanding of ‘distributed leadership’. The above findings suggest that although the defined term - distributed leadership was not fully recognised by the majority of the respondents, most of them nevertheless demonstrated a good conceptual understanding of the concept.

The Perception of the Extent of Distributed Leadership in this Department

Questions 4 and 5 identified the respondents’ perceptions of the extent to which

leadership is distributed within their departments. Firstly, the respondents were directly asked the extent of distributed leadership in their department. Aiming to then gain a deeper insight into the findings of Question 4, the design of Question 5 was based upon the theories of Harris (2004) and ESHA (2013) and included seven dimensions of distributed leadership- organisational structure, strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision-making, responsibility and accountability, and initiatives. Respondents were asked about the departmental situation from these seven perspectives, again with four options used in Question 3 (‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’). Option G (staff are eager to take on leadership responsibilities) and H (staff feel able to request leadership responsibilities) both aimed to identify the situation of staff initiatives, but with different focuses.

Question 4

Table 4.4 The extent to which leadership is distributed in the Department

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	2	7	17	2	28
Staff	11	17	50	2	80
Total	13	24	67	4	108
Rate (%)	12%	22.2%	62%	3.8%	100%

The table shows that leadership in the Department CE is distributed to some extent.

Question 5

Table 4.5 The extent to which leadership is distributed from seven dimensions

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		28	80	108	100%
A. Organisational	Strongly disagree	2	6	8	7.4%

structure	Disagree	9	17	26	24.1%
	Agree	15	51	66	61.1%
	Strongly agree	2	6	8	7.4%
B. strategic vision	Strongly disagree	1	1	2	1.9%
	Disagree	2	5	7	6.5%
	Agree	18	60	78	72.2%
	Strongly agree	7	14	21	19.4%
C. values and beliefs	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	0.9%
	Disagree	5	10	15	13.9%
	Agree	21	59	80	74.1%
	Strongly agree	2	10	12	11.1%
D. collaboration and cooperation	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	2.8%
	Disagree	5	3	8	7.4%
	Agree	19	56	75	69.4%
	Strongly agree	3	19	22	20.4%
E. decision-making	Strongly disagree	1	4	5	4.6%
	Disagree	5	9	14	13%
	Agree	19	54	73	67.6%
	Strongly agree	3	13	16	14.8%
F. responsibility and accountability	Strongly disagree	0	3	3	2.8%
	Disagree	4	1	5	4.6%
	Agree	14	46	60	55.6%

	Strongly agree	10	30	40	37%
G. Initiative (‘eager to’)	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	0.9%
	Disagree	6	13	19	17.6%
	Agree	21	58	79	73.1%
	Strongly agree	1	8	9	8.4%
H. Initiatives (‘feel able to’)	Strongly disagree	1	4	5	4.6%
	Disagree	13	23	36	33.3%
	Agree	14	47	61	56.5%
	Strongly agree	0	6	6	5.6%

The above Table shows that the majority of respondents agreed that distributed leadership relates to and occurs within ***the dimensions of*** : strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation and responsibility and accountability. In terms of starting initiatives, the findings show that there were more participants who thought that staff are eager to take on leadership roles than feel able to request responsibility.

The Mechanism of Distributed Leadership

The design of Question 6 was based upon the theories of MacBeath (2009) and NCSL (2004). Each option of this question referred to one kind of mechanism. It included formal distribution (Option A: through regulations and job description), pragmatic distribution (Option B: ad hoc delegation depending on the situation), strategic distribution (Option C: according to department plan and goal), incremental distribution (Option D: leaders intend to delegate responsibility to those staff who have leading capabilities), opportunistic distribution (Option E: staff take the initiative to ask for leadership responsibilities) and cultural

distribution (Option F: sharing responsibilities has become our culture). At the end of this questions, respondents were also able to specify other options they considered to be at play within the department.

Question 6

Table 4.6 The mechanism of distributed leadership

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	28	80	108	100%
A. Formal distribution	15	46	61	56.5%
B. Pragmatic distribution	5	12	17	15.7%
C. Strategic distribution	3	13	16	14.8%
D. Incremental distribution	4	8	12	11.1%
E. Opportunistic distribution	0	0	0	0
F. Cultural Distribution	1	0	1	0.9%
G. Others; please specify.	0	0	0	0

The findings show that the main method of leadership distribution is through formal regulations and job descriptions. It is likely that, besides formal distribution, there are other co-existing mechanisms which will be further explored through interviewing.

The Cultural Dimensions which might influence the Distribution of Leadership

Question 7 aimed to explore the cultural dimensions in relation to distributed leadership in this Chinese university. Based upon the literature from Bush and Haiyan (2000), the seven options included ‘worshipping the traditions’, ‘adoring authority’, ‘stressing collectivism’, ‘ethical and moral self-cultivation’, ‘socialist elements’ (e.g. Party Branch Secretary etc.), ‘enterprise’ and ‘patriarchy’.

Question.

Question 7

Table 4.7 The cultural dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		28	80	108	100%
A. Worshipping the traditions	Strongly disagree	0	4	4	3.7%
	Disagree	7	25	32	29.6%
	Agree	19	45	64	59.3%
	Strongly agree	2	6	8	7.4%
B. Adoring authority	Strongly disagree	0	3	3	2.8%
	Disagree	8	37	45	41.7%
	Agree	20	37	57	52.8%
	Strongly agree	0	3	3	2.7%
C. Stressing collectivism	Strongly disagree	0	4	4	3.7%
	Disagree	6	9	15	13.9%
	Agree	18	60	78	72.2%
	Strongly agree	4	7	11	10.2%
D. Moral and ethical self-cultivation	Strongly disagree	0	3	3	2.8%
	Disagree	10	26	36	33.3%
	Agree	16	48	63	58.3%
	Strongly agree	2	3	5	4.6%
E. Socialist	Strongly	1	1	2	1.8%

elements	disagree				
	Disagree	5	13	18	16.7%
	Agree	21	56	77	71.3%
	Strongly agree	1	10	11	10.2%
F, Enterprise	Strongly disagree	1	1	2	1.9%
	Disagree	14	34	48	44.4%
	Agree	13	42	55	50.9%
	Strongly agree	0	3	3	2.8%
G. Patriarchy	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	1.8%
	Disagree	6	12	18	16.7%
	Agree	20	60	80	74.1%
	Strongly agree	2	6	8	7.4%

The above table suggests that all the listed dimensions are at play in relation to distributed leadership within this department, since the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all the options.

The Beneficial Effects of Distributed Leadership

Question 8 identified the beneficial effects of distributed leadership, and again gave participants the choices of selecting ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’ for each of three aspects. Respondents were also able to specify additional answers.

Question 8

Table 4.8 The beneficial effects of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		28	80	108	100%
A. Organisational development of the Department	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	1.8%
	Disagree	1	4	5	4.6%
	Agree	23	62	85	78.8%
	Strongly agree	4	12	16	14.8%
B. Self-efficacy of staff	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	1.8%
	Disagree	3	4	7	6.5%
	Agree	20	62	82	76%
	Strongly agree	5	12	17	15.7%
C. Improvement of student performance	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	7	9	16	14.8%
	Agree	18	64	82	76%
	Strongly agree	3	7	10	9.2%
*If there are others, please specify: 1. It brings better interpersonal relationships. 2. It is beneficial for the division of work, cooperation and communication. 3. It will promote the development of Chinese Higher Education.					

Findings show that almost all the respondents held a positive view on the benefits of distributed leadership.

The Disadvantages of and Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Question 9 examined the disadvantages of and barriers to distributed leadership. It covered potential disadvantages and barriers from six perspectives and simultaneously enabled respondents to specify others. As with Question 8,

Question 9 gave respondents the options of ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’.

Question 9

Table 4.9 The disadvantages and barriers of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		28	80	108	100%
A. Formal leaders may feel threatened.	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	0.9%
	Disagree	11	29	40	37%
	Agree	17	41	58	53.7%
	Strongly agree	0	9	9	8.4%
B. It increases staff member’s burdens but gives no extra authority.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	2.8%
	Disagree	15	43	58	53.6%
	Agree	10	31	41	38%
	Strongly agree	2	4	6	5.6%
C. Staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles.	Strongly disagree	1	6	7	6.5%
	Disagree	17	52	69	63.9%
	Agree	10	22	32	29.6%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
D. Financial incentives are necessary.	Strongly disagree	1	3	4	3.7%
	Disagree	10	41	51	47.2%
	Agree	17	35	52	48.2%
	Strongly agree	0	1	1	0.9%
E. Distributing leadership	Strongly disagree	2	9	11	10.2%
	Disagree	18	52	70	64.9%

may cause strained relationships.	Agree	8	18	26	24%
	Strongly agree	0	1	1	0.9%
F. Barrier from the centralised government system.	Strongly disagree	0	3	3	2.8%
	Disagree	9	27	36	33.3%
	Agree	15	46	61	56.5%
	Strongly agree	4	4	8	7.4%
*If there are others, please specify: 1. People may enjoy rights without taking on responsibilities. 2. Modesty, a Chinese tradition, may hinder the achievement of distributed leadership.					

Compared with other question findings, ***as can be seen the*** answers to Question 9 are ***less clear*** as there are remarkable differences between the selections made for the different options. ***In terms of other disadvantages, one respondent additionally suggested that "people may enjoy rights without taking on responsibilities" and another specified the traditional Chinese trait of modesty***.

How Leadership Skills are Developed

Question 10 explored how are leadership skills are developed. It was a multiple choice question which covered five aspects and also enabled respondents to specify others.

Question 10

Table 4.10 The way to develop leadership skills

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	28	80	108	100%
A. Leaders should create more leadership	9	40	49	45.4%

positions				
B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potentiality or ability	17	48	65	60.2%
C. Staff should be more involved in decision-making	23	66	89	82.4%
D. Formal leadership training should be provided	8	40	48	44.4%
E. Others; please specify: Leaders: 1. Staff should have initiatives. 2. There is no need to improve leadership skills for staff.				

Question 11

Table 4.11 Willingness to participate in interviews

	Yes	No	Total numbers
Leaders	5	23	28
Staff	24	56	80
Total	29	79	108
Rate (%)	26.9%	73.1%	100%

According to the Table above, amongst 28 leaders, 5 were willing to be interviewed; amongst 80 staff members, 24 were interested in being interviewed. The interview respondents were then selected from these 29 potential interviewees.

4.2.2. Interview Findings

The following is a brief overview of the principal findings from the interviews. These will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. Throughout this research, members of the two groups, leaders and staff members, have been referred as 'leader X' and 'staff X', for simplicity and clarity when quoting or referring to specific respondents.

4.2.2.1. Responsibility Description

In the course of all the interviews, it was found that teaching and doing research are the two main responsibilities held by participants. Additionally, a leader and two staff mentioned that they work in the labs, showing the unique subject feature of this department:

> *"I am the director of the Chemical Engineering Experiment Centre. I teach and manage the centre by designing and promoting the experimental teaching plans"* (Leader 2).

Leader 3 stated that another responsibility of leaders is to design the postgraduate courses. As Leader 1 described:

> *"I am one of the course leader of the department. My job is to encourage and supervise other teachers to finish their works of teaching and researching"* (Leader 1).

The interview transcripts also reveal a high degree of responsibility and accountability when the respondents were asked to describe their responsibilities. One of the particular reasons for this was discovered:

> *"I feel ashamed if our department does not have a good development"* (Staff 3).

> *"Sometimes I did something for other members and our department"* (Leader

1).

"I put both time and energy into our department's development with no benefit [to me] but saw it as my own duties" (Staff 2).

4.2.2.2. Departmental Situation

Respondents were asked the question, 'how are leadership responsibilities allocated?'. All the respondents claimed that the responsibilities are mainly allocated according to their job title/seniority level, revealing the influence of the hierarchical system. As Staff members explained:

"The first level is the (Associate) Head of the Departments, followed by the second level - course leader. Then it is the Director of the Experimental Centre. The work will then be allocated to the staff" (Staff 2).

"The daily routine has been defined by roles and positions; for example, all the staff members may be gathered for a meeting when there is a big issue such as annual curriculum assessment. The head will stress its importance and then allocate the responsibilities to the course leaders, director of the experimental centre etc. Later on, those leaders will allocate the responsibilities to us again" (Staff 1).

Some respondents also show that the organisational structure is well-defined and hierarchical:

"The responsibilities have been systematic and progressed according to the (hierarchical) system. For example, the administrative and academic works follows the existing regulations designed by leaders. Certain affairs are managed by certain teachers" (Staff 4).

"The department includes many courses, and then there are teaching and

research groups. In this department, we have seven teaching and research groups within the course of Chemical Engineering. We are two thirds; the proportion of other courses is one third" (Leader 1).

The issues that have been defined and systematic within the department include not only the positions, responsibilities and regulations, but also an assessment system which is used to quantify the staff members' teaching and researching performance:

"We have a definite requirement for how much workload of teaching and doing research a staff member should finish each year. For example, a teacher needs to be the lecturer of a numbers of courses and publish a certain amount of papers within a year; the work that you have finished will be calculated into scores at the end of the year. The minimum scores that are required vary with the titles and departments. Further recruitment, salaries, year-end bonus and promotions are all based upon the assessment" (Staff 1).

Leader 2 also mentioned that the allocation is levels by levels, but he further suggested that the responsibilities may be directly allocated to certain staff in the case of a special or urgent situation. In this case, the researcher followed up with a further question as to what kind of staff member the leader would select to take on responsibilities. Leader 2 replied that the selection is based upon the staff member's abilities:

"A teacher who is good in that field will be allocated to take on responsibilities; a precise (detail-oriented) person may be allocated to help with doing paper works" (Leader 2).

This selection approach was also mentioned by Leader 3, but was not ranked as the first method of selection. According to Leader 3, he would like to select the staff member who has both initiative and passion, while Leader 1 stated that,

"leaders have their own preferences. Some of the leaders may select the

people they like or the people who are obedient…Firstly, I will select those people who have initiative; it is meaningless to ask someone to participate in leadership responsibilities when this person is not interested. Secondly, it is about a person's ability as they need to take on responsibilities" (Leader 1).

The researcher also asked about the staff member's interest in taking on leadership responsibilities. Amongst 9 staff members, only 2 interviewees expressed no interest in taking on leadership responsibilities. A female interviewee said, "I have limited abilities and am reluctant to take such a big burden. I dislike dealing with the issues of interpersonal communication" (Staff 7). Another reason given by a young interviewee was, "I want to do my own things as these responsibilities will influence my ability as a teacher" (Staff 6). Amongst the 7 interviewees who said yes, Staff 8 stated he would like to but he would not while Staff 4 mentioned that "I am interested to get involved if the time permits. I may have no time to do so as I travel a lot for my work, and I hope those responsibilities will not interrupt my overall career plan". Staff 3 claimed that her motivation is shaped by the idea of collectivism:

"Of course, I would like to do so. It is my great honour to make contributions to the development of our department although it is exhausting. But as a member of this organisation, I have this responsibility to dedicate myself to our department. (Staff 3)".

The organisational structure of the department has also provided staff with the opportunity to get involved. Leaders pointed out that there are opportunities for staff to take on leadership responsibilities:

"Responsibilities cannot all be taken on by one person as it is too much. Therefore, we sometimes encourage staff to get involved. For example, we provide opportunities for staff and students to participate in innovation projects. Teachers form a group to discuss strategies, and guide students to win the prize" (Leader 1).

"We have an academic board to discuss the issues related to academia. We also have a faculty congress for decision-making. Teachers are free to speak up and help to make decisions" (Leader 2).

These statements were supported by staff:

"There is a weekly meeting every Tuesday afternoon. Leaders will ask our advice when there are things to discuss. There are also channels to report and complain" (Staff 6).

"We have WeChat and QQ groups (online chatting tool) with all the staff involved. Anyone can send a message when there is something to be discussed or allocated. Everyone will notice instantly. It is far more convenient than before. Also, the decision process will be very public" (Staff 3).

The Relationship between Leaders and Staff

Both leaders and staff claimed that they have a good relationship with one other. Most of them mentioned that they are friends and they cooperate in works, although two staff members said that they could still feel the existence of the hierarchical system. Leader 3 stated that the relationships between leaders and staff are influenced by the leadership style of those leaders. He further added that leaders in this department have a mindset of serving staff, and therefore cultivate an autonomic culture. His view is supported by the staff members:

"We have a harmonious working environment. The definition of leaders and staff is blurred, because universities need to be flexible and autonomic" (Staff 2).

"The organisational structure is clear but we get along well with our leaders. We communicate a lot; staff complain and ask for advice, whereas leaders listen and help; we have common goals; we cooperate with each other; we have fixed regulations but we are flexible" (Staff 3).

"Sometimes we are leaders and staff; sometimes we are colleagues who work together; sometimes we are friends" (Staff 9).

4.2.2.3. Benefits and Barriers

The Benefits

Both leaders and staff agreed that it can help to improve the organisational development and staff member's own development when non-leaders take on leadership responsibilities. As Staff 1 mentioned, "It can improve the departmental development and can also help individuals to be challenged and improve", while Staff 4 commented that "the decisions will be more public and transparent". According to other transcriptions:

"The department can work more efficiently when more people contribute to decision-making because there are more ideas to solve the problem. Additionally, some professors are knowledgeable; some have high interpersonal skills. The acquaintances these professors have may help the department to get more resources, for example, or more research projects" (Leader 1).

"Some of the regulations within the university are unreasonable. For example, we have annual meetings for research policies. I have participated in them twice and I think the student admission system for the postgraduate students needs to be changed. The current system prefers to give the offers to those students who put this university as top priority but refuses to welcome the students who applied to other universities first, even though they are intelligent and excellent. The people who used to make the policy do not teach and therefore do not understand the practical application of those policies. It will benefit if teachers can get involved" (Staff 5).

"Sharing leadership responsibilities can make the university culture more diverse and innovative as everyone has different ideas. Those ideas can help the university and departments to become unique. For example, the design of the curriculums can become richer!" (Staff 11).

A leader and three staff members also pointed out another benefit – the improvement of student performance. As Staff 7 suggested, "teachers are able to learn from it and therefore teach better; students will benefit as teachers and students are bond with each other" (Staff 7).

The disadvantages of and Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Most leaders and staff suggested that sharing leadership responsibilities may cause disorder and low efficiency. As Staff 6 explained, "it is hard to make final decisions when there are more people speaking", and Staff 5 claimed that the resultant disagreements and arguments may cause conflict and estrangement between colleagues. During the interviews, none of the leaders expressed any notion of feeling threatened by staff taking on responsibilities. it should be noted that the there is no financial incentive for staff to get involve, as the budget remains the same regardless of the number of people undertaking. As Staff 1 said, "We do not care about the reward. The department will give a little bit of money but it is tiny". This is supported by Leader 2 who stated that "we would like to reward (staff for taking on leadership) with money, but everybody within this department knows that our budget is tight". Additionally, initiatives may also be one of the barriers to distributed leadership because, as mentioned earlier, staff members were concerned about whether their ability as a teacher would be influenced. As Staff 9 stated:

"It wastes my energy. For example, those teachers who have got involved into the responsibilities have less time to do research; they gave up teaching since there is no time" (Staff 9).

However, Staff 1 held opposite opinion:

"I do not think it is a burden; as a matter of fact, my ability can be improved since leadership is a comprehensive work. Nowadays, most of the leaders both teach and lead. There is no problem at all" (Staff 1).

Meanwhile, several interviewees were also concerned that the border between the powers and the responsibilities that have been taken by informal leaders is blurred and ambiguous:

"Leaders have the same amount of responsibilities and authority while for teachers, there is less authority and power when you take on leadership responsibilities. When I could not finish the tasks well as an informal leader, leaders will punish me. However, nobody likes to follow my lead when I work for it as I am not a leader and have no power. You pay more but gain less benefits" (Staff 1).

"It is not balanced and therefore we call it dedication. This will somehow influence the passion" (Staff 2).

"…You have much more responsibilities than your interests and benefits…" (Staff 9).

4.2.2.4. Leadership Skills

In the course of interviews, there appeared to be a general view that improving leadership skills for all staff is not necessary. Respondents stated that leadership skills can only be improved through practice:

"Leadership skills are gained from the working experiences. Leadership ability cannot be improved in a short period" (Leader 1).

"It is unnecessary as we are already professors who have been trained to be

teachers. We have enough knowledge to lead and manage. All we need is to practice" (Staff 1).

"Leadership skills are gained from the working experiences. Leadership ability cannot be improved in a short period. We have provided many leadership trainings for leaders, though teachers have no opportunity to attend. There is no time to provide training for everyone and also, it will not help in the short period of time" (Leader 1).

"Leadership ability is like an intelligence which [one] cannot be trained to get" (Leader 3).

*"It is not necessary to provide training to improve leadership ability. However, I want to improve my teaching ability" (*Staff 6).

Even though, there are still few respondents who mentioned that formal leadership training could be provided to develop leadership abilities. This was also referenced by some of the interviewees:

"This is something that we lack! We have trainings at the university level (for leaders), but we do not have any trainings at the departmental level (for staff members)" (Staff 2).

"It is important. We can already learn a lot even by just participating in a meeting; it is meaningful because it is interactive" (Staff 3).

"I think leadership training can help the teachers to think about the problem from the leaders' perspective" (Staff 9).

"I think it is necessary as the teachers have very low leadership skills. There were so many incidents! It would be better if they were trained to improve their leadership and management skills" (Leader 2).

Giving staff more chances to be involved so that they could gain more practical experience was a frequently mentioned method within this department for improving leadership skills. Other main strategies that were mentioned by the interviewees include workshops, online courses, and university visits:

"I want to take on more leadership responsibilities and learn from practical challenges; meanwhile, they can organise some workshops and invite some scholars for us" (Staff 1).

"Teachers should be able to go out and visit other universities; leaders should also give teachers more chances to get practiced" (Staff 9).

4.2.2.5. Chinese Cultural Elements

The above interview findings have discovered certain cultural elements in relation to distributed leadership in this department, which include hierarchy, collectivism, and interpersonal communication. The deep influence of collectivism was expressed by interviewees:

"I have been educated to consider the collective rather than individuals since I was a child. Therefore, there are fewer dissenting voices" (Staff 5).

"Teachers may sacrifice themselves for the department; for example, the mother of our director was sick and passed away during the period of teaching assessment. Instead of asking for leave, she went back home for only a few days and came back to work quickly" (Staff 1).

However, interviewees stated that the value of collectivism has been lessened:

"Collectivism is still advocated; however, it does not exist anymore. Nowadays, it is just a slogan. Collectivism used to work well during the early years of new China but has been erased by the reform and opening up. This is too bad"

(Leader 3).

"Our generation (post-50s and post-60s) has the value of collectivism. However, the idea has not been advocated afterwards. It has gradually disappeared since the prevalence of the single child policy" (Staff 7).

During interviews, the influence of traditional culture (e.g. the official standard thought, Confucianism, and patriarchy) has also been revealed:

"The idea of traditional Confucianism- more specifically, a person should respect their parents and other people with older age, higher seniority and positions" (Staff 8).

"The official standard thought has been shaped for thousands of years. People respect leaders and are eager to gain leadership power" (Leader 1).

"For our daily affairs, we usually ask the older staff members to guide the younger teachers; the young teachers can learn from their colleagues' experiences" (Leader 1).

"According to the Chinese tradition, seniority is quite important; compared with young teachers, old teachers are regarded as having more experiences and skills" (Staff 3).

The respondents pointed out the deep influence of the traditional Chinese culture in this district:

"...For example, the universities in the Guangdong province are less likely to apply to be granted rewards than the universities in our province; they (Guangdong) pay attention to money rather than those invisible honours" (Staff 9).

However, the interviews also reflected that the influence of traditional culture

has been lessened. For example, Leader 2 stated, "with the progress of time, the young generation has not worshipped the traditions and authorities like before. They are more speculative and independent". This was consistent with the statement of Staff 6 who was quoted earlier as having no interest in leadership responsibilities as he wants to do his own things. He further explained, "the reason for me to respect leaders is that they have high reputation in academia, rather than just because they are leaders". Other interviewees verified this tendency by giving their different interpretations of authority:

> *"The time of adoring heroes has been the past. Nowadays, people may adore 'power' (benefits) rather than 'authorities'; academicians are respected by people because they have power to allocate research funding"* (Leader 3).

> *"I told the students to dare to challenge the authority as this is how science makes progress. The current authorities and roles will be out of date after several decades; students should have the ability of critical thinking"* (Staff 2).

> *"I have no interest in leadership responsibilities… I want to do my own things… the reason for me to respect leaders is that they have high reputation in academia, rather than just because they are leaders"* (Staff 6).

Staff members were asked whether they think leadership in this department is autocratic; all of them stated that it is not:

> *"The decisions have to be discussed in the faculty congress. Leaders have power, but that does not mean all of their opinions are right. There is a Disciplinary Committee within the university, and another one in the district, which act as watchdogs over leaders' behaviours. We could report anything that they do wrong"* (Staff 1).

> *"Information becomes public due to the popularity of the internet, which makes it difficult for leadership to be autocratic. Anyone unsatisfied can*

complain online or write an anonymous letter" (Staff 8).

However, respondents admitted that the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down system would be hard to change:

"It will be hard to change because we have so many people in the department who [would make it] much easier to cause anarchy. Therefore, we will always need leaders and a centralised system. The important thing is the extent of autonomy and centralisation" (Staff 3).

"I think it is very hard because this is a process which cannot be achieved within one day. Also, this needs to be cultivated; some people do not have this consciousness" (Leader 3).

Respondents were asked about the influence of the Party Branch Secretary. Staff 2 explained that as a political influence, the Party Branch Secretary is mainly responsible for managing issues of Party members within the department and do not intervene in other issues in the department. He further added that department leadership is not influenced by them, but that it would be hard to achieve a higher level of autonomy without de-administration. De-administration refers to disabling the administrative title of university leaders, and separate academic power from political and administrative power. De-administration was not included in the original interview schedule, but was an additional and unanticipated topic arising from the interview process. Respondents were subsequently asked their opinion regarding de-administration. All the respondents supported the idea of de-administration but expressed different concerns:

*"I personally think it will be difficult to achieve, because although the 'administrative titles' are erased in the government, the 'administrative power' still exists" (*Staff 6).

"It is a self-awakening process within the Party. It erases the political

*influence under the political influence" (*Staff 5).

"It is hard to comment as I have no idea what will be the extent of de-administration" (Staff 3).

"De-administration is necessary; we should respect academia. Academic issues should be discussed by the academic people" (Leader 2).

4.3. The Department MP

4.3.1. Questionnaire Findings

Respondents' Basic Information

Table 4.12 Details of the respondents and department members

Categories		Numbers
Leaders	(Associate) Heads of the Department	3
	(Associate) Party Branch Secretary	2
	Department/ Course Leaders	7
	Total	12
Staff	Professors	4
	Associate Professors	25
	Teaching Fellows	37
	Total	66
Number of Respondents		78
Number of Department members (excluding Administrators)		81
Response rate (%)		96.3%

- The Conceptual Recognition of Distributed Leadership

Question 2

Table 4.13 The extent to which 'distributed leadership' is a known concept

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	4	5	3	0	12
Staff	21	36	9	0	66
Total	25	41	12	0	78
Rate (%)	32%	52.6%	15.4%	0	100%

Amongst 78 respondents, the majority of the respondents were aware of the term 'distributed leadership' to a small extent. Besides, some respondents have never heard of this term, whereas some respondents were aware of the term to some extent. None of the individuals recognised the term to a great extent.

Question 3

Table 4.14 The Conceptual understanding of the term- 'distributed leadership'

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
A. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the department.	Strong disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	11	63	74	94.9%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.1%
B. Interactions between leader and teacher, rather than only workload delegation	Strong disagree	1	0	1	1.2%
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	11	58	69	88.5%

only, are important.	Strongly agree	0	8	8	10.3%
C. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders; teachers are also involved in leadership practices such as decision-making.	Strong disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	1	1.2%
	Agree	9	61	70	89.7%
	Strongly agree	3	4	7	9.1%
Total respondents		12	66	78	100%

The Table shows that almost all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the three options, revealing a better understanding of distributed leadership than respondents' from the Department CE. Based upon the findings of Table 4-13, it is noted that most respondents in this department were aware of distributed leadership to a small extent and show a great conceptual understanding of it.

The Perception of the Extent of Distributed Leadership in this Department

Question 4

Table 4.15 The extent to which leadership is distributed

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	1	2	8	1	12
Staff	2	4	60	0	66
Total	3	6	68	1	78
Rate (%)	3.8%	7.7%	87.2%	1.3%	100%

Table 4.15 shows that most of respondents thought leadership within this department is distributed to some extent.

Question 5

Table 4.16 The extent to which leadership is distributed from seven dimensions

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	66	78	100%
A. organisational structure	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	2	3	3.8%
	Agree	10	61	71	91.1%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.1%
B. Strategic vision	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	11	55	66	84.6%
	Strongly agree	1	11	12	15.4%
C. Values and beliefs	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	11	58	69	88.5%
	Strongly agree	1	8	9	11.5%
D. Collaboration and cooperation	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	10	50	60	76.9%
	Strongly agree	2	16	18	23.1%
E. Decision-making	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0

	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	10	53	63	80.8%
	Strongly agree	2	13	15	19.2%
F. Responsibility and accountability	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	7	44	51	65.4%
	Strongly agree	5	22	27	34.6%
G. Initiative (‘eager to’)	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	8	11	14.1%
	Agree	8	55	63	80.8%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.1%
H. Initiative (‘feel able to’)	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	7	14	21	26.9%
	Agree	5	52	57	73.1%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0

The Table shows that all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that distributed leadership relates to and occurs with the dimension of strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision-making, and responsibility and accountability. None of the respondents strongly disagreed with any options, showing a high extent of distributed leadership in this department. On initiative-taking, the numbers of respondents who thought staff member are eager to take on leadership roles was higher than the number of respondents who think staff members feel able to request responsibilities. It reveals that, even though they may be eager to take on leadership responsibilities,

staff may be unable to do so for certain reasons.

The Mechanism of Distributed Leadership

Question 6

Table 4.17 The mechanism of distributed leadership

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	66	78	100%
A. Formal distribution	2	10	12	15.4%
B. Pragmatic distribution	6	27	33	42.3%
C. Strategic distribution	4	24	28	35.8%
D. Incremental distribution	0	2	2	2.6%
E. Opportunistic distribution	0	1	1	1.3%
F. Cultural Distribution	0	2	2	2.6%
G. Others; please specify.	0	0	0	0

According to the Table, leadership is mainly distributed through ad hoc delegation. Additionally, the findings also reveal the possibility of other co-existing mechanisms of distributed leadership (strategic distribution, formal distribution) within this department.

The Cultural Dimensions which might influence the Distribution of Leadership

Question 7

Table 4.18 The cultural dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	66	78	100%

A. Worshipping the traditions	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	31	35	44.9%
	Agree	8	35	43	55.1%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
B. Adoring authority	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.3%
	Disagree	6	37	43	55.1%
	Agree	5	28	33	42.3%
	Strongly agree	1	0	1	1.3%
C. Stressing collectivism	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	1	1	1.3%
	Agree	11	64	75	96.1%
	Strongly agree	1	1	2	2.6%
D. Moral and ethical self-cultivation	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	4	5	6.4%
	Agree	10	58	68	87.2%
	Strongly agree	1	4	5	6.4%
E. Socialist elements	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	4	7	9%
	Agree	9	52	61	78.2%
	Strongly agree	0	10	10	12.8%
F. Enterprise	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0

	Disagree	5	6	11	14.1%
	Agree	5	46	51	65.4%
	Strongly agree	2	14	16	20.5%
G. Patriarchy	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	6	7	9%
	Agree	8	41	49	62.8%
	Strongly agree	3	19	22	28.2%

Apart from the dimension of adoring authority, the listed culture dimensions are all recognized as functioning in relation to distributed leadership. The most dimensions were stressing collectivism, moral and ethical self-cultivation, and socialist elements respectively, whereas the least was worshipping the traditions.

The Beneficial Effects of Distributed Leadership

Question 8

Table 4.19 The beneficial effects of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	66	78	100%
A. Organisational development of the Department	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	9	48	57	73%
	Strongly agree	3	18	21	27%
B, Self-efficacy of staff	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	0	1	1	1.3%

	Agree	10	44	54	69.2%
	Strongly agree	2	21	23	29.5%
C, Improve student performance	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	0	3	3.8%
	Agree	7	40	47	60.3%
	Strongly agree	2	26	28	35.9%
*If there are others, please specify: None.					

It is notable that almost all the respondents held a positive view on the benefits of distributed leadership. Compared with the results of the first department (Chemical Engineering), respondents were less likely to hold negative views.

The Disadvantages of and Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Question 9

Table 4.20 The disadvantages and barriers of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	66	78	100%
A. Formal leaders may feel threatened	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	7	24	31	39.7%
	Agree	5	42	47	60.3%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
B. It increases staff member's	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.3%
	Disagree	6	27	33	42.3%

burdens but gives no extra authority	Agree	6	38	44	56.4%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
C. Staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	disagree	7	29	36	46.2%
	Agree	5	37	42	53.8%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
D. Financial incentives are necessary	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	9	11	14.1%
	Agree	7	47	54	69.2%
	Strongly agree	3	10	13	16.7%
E. Distributing leadership may cause strained relationships	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	8	17	25	32%
	Agree	4	42	46	59%
	Strongly agree	0	7	7	9%
F, The barrier from the centralised government system	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	9	12	15.4%
	Agree	9	39	48	61.5%
	Strongly agree	0	18	18	23.1%
*If there are others, please specify: 1. Chinese traditions. 2. It may cause low efficiency in the short-term and needs a long time to be achieved.					

According to the Table, all the listed disadvantages and barriers were recognised by most of the respondents. However, the results from the leaders' perspective regarding the option of 'it increases staff member's burdens but gives no extra authority' and the option of 'staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles' are opposite to the results of staff and the overall respondents. This situation also occurred on the option of 'strained relationships may be caused' which was recognised by most of the respondents, but was disagreed with by the majority of leaders.

How Leadership Skills are Developed

Question 10

Table 4.21 The way to develop leadership skills

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	66	78	100%
A. Leaders should create more leadership positions	3	9	12	15.4%
B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potentiality or ability	8	47	55	70.5%
C. Staff should be more involved in decision-making	11	54	65	83.3%
D. Formal leadership training should be provided	8	45	53	68%
E. Others; please specify. None.				

Question 11

Table 4.22 Willingness to participate in Interviews

	Yes	No	Total
Leaders	3	9	12
Staff	7	59	66
Total	10	68	78
Rate (%)	12.8%	87.2%	100%

According to the Table, amongst 12 leaders and 66 staff, 3 leaders and 7 staff were willing to be interviewed. 10 respondents who ticked 'yes' were then all invited to be interviewed.

4.3.2. Interview Findings

4.3.2.1. Responsibility Description

As with the Chemical Engineering department, the two main responsibilities of both leaders and staff are teaching and researching. Teaching is more important within this department as maths and physics within Chinese universities are two core modules for all the science students. In this case, the teachers in this department need to delivery professional courses for students majoring in maths or physics, and public courses for other science students. Mathematical modeling is to solve a practical problem mathematically by quantifying the fundamental factors underneath; Mathematical contests in modelling were also mentioned as a staff responsibility:

> *"We have many modelling contests such as contests on campus or with other universities. Teachers create a team and gather together for it; we open the registration, provide guidance to students, and lead them to finish the contests"* (Staff 6).

Additionally, the leaders' responsibility was suggested by Leader 3:

"As the Head of the Department, I oversee the general issues - the decisions regarding subject development, teachers' promotions, students' graduations, etc." (Leader 3).

4.3.2.2. Departmental Situation

When asked about the allocation of leadership responsibilities, the most frequently given answer was that responsibilities are allocated according to the job titles. However, there are some special occasions on which this may not be the case:

"Some teachers will be allocated as informal leaders for modelling contests; then, they call other teachers together to make a team and discuss strategies" (Staff 1).

The researcher followed up with a further question as to what kind of staff member the leader would select to take on responsibilities. Leaders said that:

"When the tough teaching tasks or complicated scientific research projects come up, "I will allocate the work to those staff members who are good in that field or have more experiences than others…The staff members who have positive energy, potential ability, and are interested in taking on leadership responsibilities" (Leader 1).

"Educational background is also considered; I have always said that this will be too easy if you already get your doctoral degree… Young teachers who are at the beginning of their career will be allocated to take on secretarial responsibilities in the office. The rationale for doing so is to help them to get familiar with the environment and other colleagues" (Leader 2).

Although there are opportunities to take on responsibilities, most staff claimed

that they have no interest in doing so. Staff 3 stated that the allocated responsibilities are mainly repetitive work such as collating documents and filling forms. Staff 4 pointed out that taking on those responsibilities may interrupt his working plans and take up both time and energy. Meanwhile, the researcher does find that leaders within Department MP were trying to take control during the distribution of leadership:

"...But I do not encourage everyone to be involved as some people have no aptitude to lead; for example, those people who have bad communication skills" (Leader 3).

"Everyone should be invited to participate in the decision-making process by giving suggestions, but most of the leading responsibility should only be performed by certain staff who are experienced and good at doing it. It is unrealistic to get everyone involved" (Leader 1).

The Relationship between Leaders and Staff

Respondents in this department suggested that the relationship between leaders and staff is harmonious. They gave various reasons:

"The public courses enable us to meet in the teaching and research office, wherein teachers communicate their ideas and share their course slides. Everyone within the group likes to talk about it as we are using the same book to teach the same public courses. This helps to improve the quality of teaching quality" (Leader 1).

"The harmony is in relation to our subject feature - our way of thinking. We maths people are simple and straightforward. There are fewer confrontations" (Staff 1).

"We are a very harmonious department. We need team work on teaching, doing research and mathematical contests in modelling. There are no conflicts

or estrangement in the team" (Staff 6).

4.3.2.3. Benefits and Barriers

The Benefits

The interviews confirmed that both leaders and staff think distributed leadership can help to improve both organisational development and personal development. According to the interviewees:

> *"Besides organisational development, staff are also able to gain more resources and information; it brings high efficacy of working"* (Staff 1).

> *"The process of decision-making will be more democratic"* (Staff 2).

> *"Staff may have a sense of belonging and therefore have more initiative to do more works. They may also gain a deeper understanding of their subjects. In particular, staff who have ample working experiences can use their vision and knowledge to help the department to make better decisions"* (Leader 2).

> *"Firstly, it brings about mutual understanding because staff will understand the hardship of being a leader. Secondly, staff can have a sense of fulfillment when they are approved by others; they can also learn many new things. But I do not encourage everyone to be involved as some people have no aptitude to lead; for example, those people who have bad communication skills"* (Leader 3).

Staff 4 claimed that students will also benefit:

> *"Besides organisational development, staff are also able to gain more resources and information; it brings high efficacy of working"* (Staff 1).

"Staff may have a sense of belonging and therefore have more initiative to do more work. They may also gain a deeper understanding of their subjects. In particular, staff who have ample working experiences can use their vision and knowledge to help the department to make better decisions" (Leader 2).

"Firstly, it brings about mutual understanding because staff will understand the hardship of being a leader. Secondly, staff can have a sense of fulfilment when they are approved by others; they can also learn many new things" (Leader 3).

"Teachers will have more initiative to get involved; they can feel they are the main characters" (Staff 6).

The benefits are further explained by Staff 6, who stated that "our main goal is to gain a high quality of teaching. With the improvement of teachers' teaching and management skills, students will ultimately benefit". This is also borne out in other interviews:

"Teachers are able to learn from it and therefore teach better; students will benefit as teachers and students are bonded with each other" (Staff 7).

"Students will definitely be benefited as they could directly gain practical experiences through helping their teachers when their supervisors get involved in more research projects or leadership responsibilities" (Staff 2).

The Disadvantages and Barriers

The staff interviews suggested that taking on leadership responsibilities is a waste of time and energy; as Staff 6 asserted, "it will influence my ability of being a teacher. My teaching may not be influenced directly, but research may be interrupted". Concerns regarding low efficiency of decision-making and estrangement between organisational members were also mentioned by both leaders and staff. Additionally, formal leaders were cited as a potential barrier to

distributed leadership within this department. As mentioned earlier, according to Leader 3, people who are seen as having no aptitude to lead will not be encouraged to take on responsibilities. A similar opinion was expressed by Leader 1:

> *"Everyone should be invited to participate in the decision-making process by giving suggestions, but most of the leading responsibility should only be performed by certain staff who are experienced and good at doing it. It is unrealistic to get everyone involved"* (Leader 1).

Staff members were asked whether they think leadership in their department is autocratic. Almost all of them confirmed that leadership is not autocratic although interviewees mentioned that the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down system still need time to be changed:

> *"I think it is quite democratic because there are many people getting involved. Your opinions and suggestions can be considered and adopted"* (Staff 5).

> *"The influence of the official standard thought in the traditional culture has existed for so long and will take several decades to be lessened"* (Staff 1).

> *"It is not hard but it just takes time. The reform needs to be slow and soft"* (Leader 3).

4.3.2.4. Leadership Skills

The interviews revealed that there is no leadership training for improving leadership ability. Out of the three leaders, two thought it is important to improve leadership abilities. For example, as Leader 3 stated:

> *"I think it is important; being a teacher is mainly to teach students. The improvement of leadership skills is able to help teachers to manage the*

classroom well and know how to communicate with students" (Leader 3).

Apart from Staff 4 who suggested that there should be teacher training and workshops during the induction week, the rest of the staff think it is unnecessary. The reasons were as follows:

"The proportion of leaders is relatively low. There is no need to train everyone to be a potential leader; leaders are only a few within an organisation. Teaching skills matter more" (Staff 2).

"Teachers just need to do their duty. They can participate in the decision-making process but most of the leadership responsibilities should be taken by the formal leaders and only a few professional staff member. It is unrealistic to make everyone take part into leadership activities and therefore there is no need (to provide training)…" (Leader 1).

4.3.2.5. Chinese Cultural Elements

As to the cultural dimensions participants consider to be relevant in relation to distributed leadership, collectivism, the official standard thought, moral and ethical self-cultivation, and the influence of enterprise culture were mentioned within this department. Consistent with the Department CE, the significance of collectivism was addressed by interviewees, but with varying interpretations:

"Staff are still told to think of us as a group. But some staff only focus on themselves - they have no interest in collective activities" (Leader 3).

"Collectivism is lessened by the flexibility of being a university teacher as we do not need to show up every day…The aim of taking on leadership responsibilities is for personal gain/progress, rather than for organisational development" (Staff 1).

The idea of collectivism has also been lessened by the flexibility of working in universities and the influence of enterprise culture. According to Staff 2, people have learnt individualism from the outside world and have become more materialistic since the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978. As respondents stated that:

> *"The power of traditional culture has been decreased; helping others, being selflessness, being honest and upright etc… People have become materialistic since the reform and opening up. Benefits and interests are the most important"* (Leader 1).

> *"Staff are still told to think of us as a group. But some staff only focus on themselves - they have no interest in collective activities … The socialist market economy has weakened the tradition of moral and ethical self-cultivation, such as being selflessness. People become more realistic; they focus on money and benefits. More specifically, teachers are more likely to think of themselves, rather than collectivism"* (Leader 3).

> *"Collectivism is lessened by the flexibility of being a university teacher as we do not need to show up every day… The aim of taking on leadership responsibilities is for personal gain/progress, rather than for organisational development"* (Staff 1).

> *"People learn individualism from the outside world while the teamwork or collectivism have been abandoned; this is the cause of the reform and opening up!"* (Staff 2).

> *"It varies with people. Leaders like collectivism while as a staff members, I put my personal development as my top priority"* (Staff 3).

Later, Leader 3 further stated that the socialist market economy also decreases the official standard thought:

"With the development of the economy, being an officials is are still tough while citizens have become rich and are able to enjoy life. Thoughts have been changed" (Leader 3).

In keeping with this statement, adoring authority is also decreased. The interviewees showed this tendency by giving their different interpretations of authority:

"People used to think highly of an official rather than a farmer if they are in front of the public together…With the development of the economy, being an official is still tough while citizens have become rich and are able to enjoy life. Thoughts have been changed" (Leader 3).

"I think authority should be understood from two perspectives, the academic authority and administrative authority. I would definitely respect and adore the academic authority, while leadership authority is not as cool as people imagine" (Staff 6).

As one of the moral doctrines in Confucianism, the doctrine of the mean thought (Zhongyong) was also frequently mentioned by the interviewees:

"Influenced by the Confucianism, the leaders in this district are more considerate and flexible in order to maintain the harmony; they need to consider everyone's feelings. The south part of China and Western countries are more likely to follow the rules and regulations, with no consideration of the milk of human kindness. When things are unsuccessful, they are unsuccessful. However, leaders here may come and comfort you or even help you to work out…. The regulation is dead whereas the people are alive" (Leader 2).

"Some teachers may have the thought of taking on leadership responsibilities or becoming a formal leader but they will not take action to achieve it, because of the influence of the doctrine of the mean thought. They just think

about it but are afraid to speak out" (Staff 6).

"The doctrine of the mean thought has an impact on departmental leadership; the harmony, the balance... Everyone wants to keep a peaceful environment" (Leader 3).

The influence of the socialist culture was also asked. The respondents explained the role of Party Branch at both university and departmental level:

"Some people think the establishment of the General Party Branch is not necessary but I think it is one of the Chinese characteristics. For example, I cannot handle the student affairs while the General Party Branch can manage the student affairs very well as they know what the students are thinking about (their thoughts and values). The universities in the West are only responsible for the students' study and the police will be called when there are accidents. We do not work like that" (Leader 1).

"I cannot tell the specific influence of the Party Branch. At the university level, the Communist Party Secretary is the top leader followed by the Principals. The Communist Party is mainly responsible for the political direction whereas the specific development affairs are managed by the Principals. The influence of the Communist Party will not be noticed when there are no political mistakes" (Leader 2).

"The situation in the university is different with the departments. At the university level, the Communist Party Secretary is the top leader while at the departmental level, the Department Head is the top leader" (Leader 3).

"For example, they led the party members to make the vow under the party flag last year, but it is not important for other teachers who are not party members" (Staff 1).

At last, the issue of de-administration was also discussed in Department MP:

"It has been proposed for twenty years but is never truly carried out. The reason that people like to become Department Heads is associated with benefits; leaders have many resources such as research projects and are more likely to get more research projects from the district (as they have titles and authorities in the local government). It is hard to change since the official standard thought is still deep" (Leader 1).

"It is great for our teachers as the attitudes of administrators are very bad; they are ignorant as the administrative power is too strong" (Leader 2).

"I fully support this proposal. Based upon my understanding, I think de-administration means that leaders will not be administrative leaders in the local government; this means the government will not consider us as local officials. Therefore, I will not be restricted to go abroad or open my company. Now, I am not allowed to do these things as a leader" (Leader 3).

4.4. The Department EM

4.4.1. Questionnaire Findings

Respondents' Basic Information

Table 4.23 Details of the respondents and department members

Categories		Numbers
Leaders	(Associate) Heads of the Department	3
	(Associate) Party Branch Secretary	3
	Department/ Course Leaders	10
	Total	16

Staff	Professors	5
	Associate Professors	11
	Teaching fellows	39
	Total	55
Number of respondents		71
Number of the department members (excluding Administrators)		80
Respondent rate (%)		88.75%

The Conceptual Recognition of Distributed Leadership

Question 2

Table 4.24 The extent to which 'distributed leadership' is a known concept

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	3	6	7	0	16
Staff	13	19	22	1	55
Total	16	25	29	1	71
Rate (%)	22.5%	35.2%	40.8%	1.5%	100%

The Table reveals that leadership within this department is more likely to be distributed to some extent. There were also some participants who were not aware of the term at all.

Question 3

Table 4.25 The conceptual understanding of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
A. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the	Strong disagree	1	3	4	5.6%
	Disagree	6	18	24	33.8%

department	Agree	7	30	37	52.2%
	Strongly agree	2	4	6	8.4%
B. Interactions between leader and the teacher, rather than workload delegation only, are important	Strong disagree	0	1	1	1.4%
	Disagree	2	16	18	25.4%
	Agree	10	26	36	50.7%
	Strongly agree	4	12	16	22.5%
C. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders; teachers are also involved in leadership practices such as decision-making	Strong disagree	0	1	1	1.4%
	Disagree	3	9	12	16.9%
	Agree	10	40	50	70.4%
	Strongly agree	3	5	8	11.3%
Total respondents		16	55	71	100%

Most of the respondents held a positive view on the listed options, showing a good understanding of the term- distributed leadership. The findings of the two Tables above reveal that 'distributed leadership' as a concept has been recognised to some extent by the most respondents of this department who have a good conceptual understanding of it.

The Perception of the Extent of Distributed Leadership in this Department

Question 4

Table 4.26 The extent to which leadership is distributed

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents

Leaders	0	3	12	1	16
Staff	3	22	28	2	55
Total	3	25	40	3	71
Rate (%)	4.2%	35.2%	56.3%	4.3%	100%

The Table data shows that most of the participants thought that leadership within this department is distributed to some extent.

Question 5

Table 4.27 The extent to which leadership is distributed from seven dimensions

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		16	55	71	100%
A. Organisational structure	Strongly disagree	1	3	4	5.6%
	Disagree	5	16	21	29.6%
	Agree	5	25	30	42.3%
	Strongly agree	5	11	16	22.5%
B. Strategic vision	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.4%
	Disagree	2	9	11	15.5%
	Agree	11	34	45	63.4%
	Strongly agree	3	11	14	19.7%
C. Values and beliefs	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	5	10	15	21.2%
	Agree	9	42	51	71.8%
	Strongly agree	2	1	3	4.2%
D. Collaboration	Strongly	0	1	1	1.5%

and cooperation	disagree				
	Disagree	2	7	9	12.6%
	Agree	7	32	39	54.9%
	Strongly agree	7	15	22	31%
E. Decision-making	Strongly disagree	0	3	3	4.2%
	Disagree	2	9	11	15.5%
	Agree	12	39	51	71.8%
	Strongly agree	2	4	6	8.5%
F. Responsibility and accountability	Strongly disagree	2	1	3	4.2%
	Disagree	2	4	6	8.5%
	Agree	8	29	37	52.1%
	Strongly agree	4	21	25	35.2%
G. Initiative (‘eager to’)	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	4	13	17	24%
	Agree	12	37	49	69%
	Strongly agree	0	3	3	4.2%
H. Initiative (‘feel able to’)	Strongly Disagree	2	1	3	4.3%
	Disagree	4	20	24	34.8%
	Agree	6	30	36	52.2%
	Strongly Agree	2	4	6	8.7%

It can be found out that all the options were agreed or strongly agreed with by most of the respondents, revealing the extent of distributed leadership within this

department. Consistent with the two other departments discussed so far; respondents demonstrated that they thought staff are more eager to take on leadership roles than they are (or feel) able to request that responsibility.

The Mechanism of Distributed Leadership

Question 6

Table 4.28 The mechanism of distributed leadership

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	16	55	71	100%
A. Formal distribution	7	27	34	47.9%
B. Pragmatic distribution	7	11	18	25.4%
C. Strategic distribution	1	12	13	18.3%
D. Incremental distribution	0	5	5	7%
E. Opportunistic distribution	0	0	0	0
F. Cultural distribution	1	0	1	1.4%
G. Others; please specify.	0	0	0	0

The table shows that leadership is mainly distributed through formal regulations and job descriptions. The possibility of co-existing mechanisms such as formal distribution and strategic distribution is also suggested.

The Cultural Dimensions which might influence the Distribution of Leadership

Question 7

Table 4.29 The cultural dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		16	55	71	100%
A. Worshipping the traditions	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	13	17	23.9%
	Agree	11	41	52	73.2%
	Strongly agree	1	1	2	4.9%
B, Adoring authority	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	9	21	30	42.3%
	Agree	7	30	37	52.1%
	Strongly agree	0	2	2	2.8%
C, Stressing collectivism	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	6	8	11.3%
	Agree	12	39	51	71.8%
	Strongly agree	2	10	12	16.9%
D, Moral and ethical self-cultivation	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	5	14	19	26.8%
	Agree	8	34	42	59.2%
	Strongly agree	3	7	10	14%
E, Socialist elements	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.4%
	Disagree	0	6	6	8.5%
	Agree	13	40	53	74.6%
	Strongly	2	9	11	15.5%

	agree				
F, Enterprise	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	9	20	29	40.8%
	Agree	5	33	38	53.5%
	Strongly agree	2	0	2	2.8%
G. Patriarchy	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	7	9	12.7%
	Agree	14	46	60	84.5%
	Strongly agree	0	2	2	2.8%

The listed cultural dimensions are all acknowledged by participants in relation to distributed leadership. The options that were ticked the most were the option of stressing collectivism, socialist elements, and patriarchy. The option of adoring authority and enterprise were ticked by the fewest respondents, although the proportions were still over half.

The Beneficial Effects of Distributed Leadership

Question 8

Table 4.30 The beneficial effects of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		16	55	71	100%
A. Organisational development of the Department	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.4%
	Disagree	3	3	6	8.5%
	Agree	11	33	44	62%
	Strongly	2	18	20	28.1%

	agree				
B. Self-efficacy of staff	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.4%
	Disagree	2	0	2	2.8%
	Agree	11	45	56	78.9%
	Strongly agree	3	9	12	16.9%
C. Improve student performance	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	4	6	10	14%
	Agree	11	43	54	76.2%
	Strongly agree	1	4	5	7%
If there are others, please specify: None.					

The findings reveal that above half of the respondents held a positive view on the listed benefits of distributed leadership. The option of staff's self-efficacy was agreed and strongly agreed with by the most respondents.

The Disadvantages of Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Question 9

Table 4.31 The disadvantages and barriers of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		16	55	71	100%
A. Formal leaders may feel threatened	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.4%
	Disagree	5	29	34	47.9%
	Agree	1	24	25	35.2%
	Strongly	9	2	11	15.5%

	agree				
B. It increases staff member's burdens but gives no extra authority	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	15	19	26.8%
	Agree	11	37	48	67.6%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.6%
C, Staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	2.8%
	Disagree	8	31	39	55%
	Agree	7	21	28	39.4%
	Strongly agree	1	1	2	2.8%
D. Financial incentives are necessary	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	23	27	38%
	Agree	11	29	40	56.3%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.7%
E. Distributing leadership may cause strained relationships	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.4%
	Disagree	12	37	59	83%
	Agree	2	15	17	23.9%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	5.7%
F. The central government system makes it hard to achieve	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.4%
	Disagree	2	7	9	12.7%
	Agree	11	45	56	78.9%
	Strongly agree	2	3	5	7%
*If there are others, please specify:					

None.

The Table suggests that the option of 'it increases staff member's burdens but gives no extra authority', 'financial incentives', and 'centralised government system' were agreed or strongly agreed with by most of the respondents. Meanwhile, the option of 'formal leaders may feel threatened', 'staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles', and 'strained relationships may be caused' were disagreed with or strongly disagreed by most of the respondents, showing a fairly even split of views.

How are Leadership Skills are Developed

Question 10

Table 4.32 The way to develop leadership skills

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	16	55	71	100%
A. Leaders should create more leadership positions	13	28	41	57.8%
B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potential or ability	12	41	53	74.6%
C. Staff should be more involved in decision-making	9	43	41	57.8%
D. Formal leadership training should be provided	6	12	18	25.4%
E. Others; please specify. None.				

Different from the previous two departments discussed so far in this chapter,

most of the respondents in this department though that leaders should identify those with leadership potential. The majority of respondents thought that leaders should create more leadership positions and make staff members get involve in decision-making. There were only a few respondents thought that formal leadership training should be provided.

Question 11

Table 4.33 Willingness to participate in interviews

	Yes	No	Total numbers
Leaders	5	9	14
Staff	10	46	56
Total	15	55	70
Rate (%)	21.4%	78.6%	100%

Table reveals that amongst 78 participants, 5 leaders and 10 staff were willing to be interviewed. Interviewees were then selected from this group.

4.4.2. Interview Findings

4.4.2.1. Responsibility Description

According to the leaders, their principal responsibility is for the overall development of this department; for example, organising the activities of teaching and researching groups, designing course handbooks and development plan, doing teaching assessments etc. The main responsibility of staff members is teaching. Different from the earlier departments discussed in this chapter, only two interviewees within this department talked about doing research, revealing the unique focus of different departments.

4.4.2.2. Departmental Situation

Both leaders and staff mentioned that the main responsibilities are allocated according to the titles and regulations. As respondents said:

> *"… the decision will be made through the meeting, and then responsibilities will be taken by certain people… If the work is about research, the associate Head who is responsible for research will take it; if it is about postgraduate students, the staff who manages postgraduates will take it…*" (Leader 1).

> *"The allocation has been defined; there are leaders who are responsible for teaching and leaders who are responsible for researching. For the big issues, for example if I want to spend some money, I will need to ask the department head first. The responsibilities have been defined by the positions. You need to find the right person according to the levels and positions"* (Leader 2).

> *"The allocation is according to the levels and positions; this is to say, leaders allocate to the teachers"* (Staff 2).

In keeping with the Department CE, a strict and defined assessment system was also mentioned within this department:

> *"The assessment is mainly to assess the ability of the individuals, and has no relation to how many leadership responsibilities staff members take on. You will be promoted quicker if you are good at doing research and have more publications. Therefore, taking on extra leadership responsibilities for staff members is a burden. Several years ago, people liked to get involved in responsibilities as this assessment system had not been launched yet. They had a sense of fulfilment of doing things. But nowadays, there is an annual assessment and everyone feels stressed and competitive. Taking on leadership responsibilities is not included in the assessment system and therefore will not bring you any benefit… This a countrywide problem but the situation of universities in the south part of China may be better since they have more funding to reward the teachers for doing publications and research; those*

good professors from leading universities may not care about the assessment and score. However, this policy has made some people in our university become materialistic; they care about how many scores they could get for doing certain things. Some are not interested in doing work if they do not gain a score [for it]" (Leader 2).

Interview findings reveal that the organisational structure of the departments does provide a variety of channels for staff members to get involved in the decision-making process:

"The final decisions about academic issues are made and discussed by the academic committee, which is made up of both leaders and some representative professors. The administrative issues are discussed at the departmental administration meeting, which is made up of the leaders of the department. The student affairs are discussed by Party Branch Secretaries… The issues related to the benefit of staff will be discussed at the department administration meeting, wherein the opinions and comments are gathered. The decisions are finally made after that" (Leader 2).

However, the interview transcripts from Department EM participants also reveal that, compared with the other three departments, the organisational structure is less likely to promote the distribution of responsibilities:

"We don't have the structure (for distributed leadership). Or maybe we do have a mechanism to help staff members to get involved in decision-making processes within our organisational structure. However, its application is highly related to the style of leaders. Leaders could just say: "it is no big deal and there is no need to ask the academic committee". As one of the members of the academic committee, we could just let it go" (Leader 2).

"Staff members within an institution have their own duties and positions. Why should they be encouraged to take responsibilities of others?" (Staff 7).

Leaders were further asked what kind of staff member they would select to take on responsibilities. Leader 2 said:

> *"Young teachers who are at the beginning of their career will be allocated to take on secretarial responsibilities in the office. The rationale for doing so is to help them to get familiar with the environment and other colleagues… Personality is also a way of selecting – some teachers are obedient. Leaders are more likely to find this kind of staff member"* (Leader 2).

While complaints regarding use of this strategy by leaders were recorded in interview with staff members in the departments:

> *"When I did my PhD in this department, leaders barely asked me to do things. Nowadays, I have graduated and the workloads become more and more. I did nothing but work for this department last year. I would like to help at first but I feel so tired when being asked again and again to take on responsibilities since the workloads are really a lot!"* (Staff 4).

> *"Young teachers are provided with leadership training such as working as an assistant, but young teachers complained about it quite often"* (Staff 1).

In keeping with the selection of informal leaders, leader 1 listed three qualities: "the staff members who have positive energy, potential ability, and are interested in taking on leadership responsibilities" (Leader 1). He further added that he encourages staff to take on responsibilities through oral praise and monetary reward. However, some staff still have no interest in pursuing responsibilities. As Staff 7 explained,

> *"I am aged fifty; I am too old to have the ambition of becoming a department leader. I am busy working outside of the university. Also, leaders do not like me to have ambition toward leadership. It is meaningless to create initiatives if they do not ask me to do so"* (Staff 7).

The statement of Staff 7 showed the influence of Confucianism – modesty; altruism; 'Doctrine of the Mean' thought (*Zhongyong*). Briefly, *Zhongyong* in relation to getting along with people would mean be gentle and avoid conflicts (for example: do not ask the questions when others do not want to answer).

The Relationship between Leaders and Staff

The respondents suggested that while the relationship between leaders and staff is harmonious, it is pretty loose and limited by hierarchy:

> *"Teachers manage their own business and leave after their lectures. Sometimes, they work as a team carrying out research projects, but are not connected with this department. We- course leaders- are doing most of the works!"* (Leader 2).

> *"The relationship is quite definitive. There is a clear hierarchical structure"* (Staff 1).

> *"Leaders and staff are equal, as leaders used to be staff members and are still working as teachers. They know our positions well so it is not hard to communicate. We sometimes also cooperate on research*" (Staff 3).

4.4.2.3. Benefits and Barriers

The Benefits

The interviews revealed that distributed leadership is beneficial for both organisational and individual development, as staff advised that it produces more initiatives and higher efficacy:

> *"It is good for uniting as people bring more power. The development of the department can be much easier and work can become more efficient" (Staff 5).*

Five staff members also asserted that students benefit when teachers take on leadership responsibilities:

"Teachers can also learn how to manage and lead the students when they take on leadership responsibilities in the department. They could have a wider and deeper insight when they teach" (Staff 4).

"Our main goal is to gain a high quality of teaching. With the improvement of teachers' teaching and management skills, students will ultimately benefit" (Staff 6).

However, according to Staff 4, the relationship between distributed leadership and student performance is both indirect and invisible after a short period of time of the teacher taking on those responsibilities.

The Disadvantages and Barriers

The major issue arising regarding the drawbacks of distributed leadership was whether taking on leadership responsibilities will negatively influence a staff member's ability as a teacher. Respondents held different opinions:

"Teachers will need to give up some of their teaching workload to take on extra leadership responsibilities, as teaching and leading at the same time is too much pressure. You may want to do all the things together but the reality is you do nothing good enough" (Staff 2).

"The workload will not be too much if everyone gets involved. I used to like taking on responsibilities, but I feel so tired now because there is a limited number of people facing huge amounts of work" (Staff 4).

"Teachers may have no time to participate in [extra responsibilities], especially when we have no money to motivate them" (Leader 2).

However, there were several teachers holding opposite opinions:

"The ability of being a teacher may be influenced by being a formal leader, but will not be influenced by occasionally being an informal leader. There is no logical relation between taking on leadership responsibilities and the quality of teaching or researching, because it depends on an individual's potential ability and efforts! Teachers can keep balance by making a plan" (Staff 5).

"You will get punished when you do something wrong if you take on leadership responsibilities as a formal leader. However, as an informal leader, your salary and your title of professor will not be influenced by doing anything wrong while taking on responsibilities because you are not in the formal position. The advantage of becoming an informal leader is flexible; you can jump in or jump out anytime you want! (Staff 2).

4.4.2.4. Leadership Skills

Only Leader 1 pointed out the significance of improving leadership skills for all staff; other interviewees claimed that it is not necessary to do so. The main reason given was that not everyone leads and there is only a few who are in the leadership positions. This is referenced by some of the interviewees:

"Our department, the Department of Economic Management, is different from others. Our teachers already have enough knowledge of leading and management" (Leader 2).

"There is no need to get trained if you are not a formal leader" (Staff 4).

"It is not necessary to provide training for teachers unless someone has been considered as a potential formal leader in the future. Within an organisation,

everyone has their roles" (Staff 7).

Staff 1 advised that online courses may be a good way to improve leadership skills as it is a flexible and approachable option for the staff members who have interest.

4.4.2.5. Chinese Cultural Elements

During the interviews, the specific district culture of Confucianism was addressed:

> *"As the hometown of Confucius, this district is deeply influenced by Confucianism; it emphasises tolerance, self-cultivation, modesty etc. The local people's characteristics are influenced by the district culture. People have different characteristics in different districts and this will certainly influence leadership"* (Leader 1).

According to the respondents, with the influence of the traditional culture, staff members have a strongly awareness of the leadership positions and are more likely to follow the guidance of leaders (and parents). They stated that the universities in this district are still deeply influenced by the official standard thought. However, the tendency of adoring authority has been decreased:

> *"The post-80s and post-90s have stronger self-awareness; they will express their feelings and challenge the authorities if they are not satisfied, though the cultural assimilation may be more powerful"* (Leader 2).

Respondents also addressed the significance of harmony and interpersonal relationship:

> *"Chinese people do not like conflicts. Harmony is so important, no matter whether it is true or on the surface. Nobody likes to be the first one to take a*

risk and point out the problem, even though everyone knows there is something wrong. The harmony is there but the problems are always there too" (Leader 2).

"Outspokenness may bring negative consequences. Compared with the truth, Chinese people pay more attention to the relationships and other people's dignity. The benefit of it is that people are more likely to be united, as being honest and judgemental may bring harm and estrangement" (Staff 1).

"Sometimes I use my personal relationship to allocate the work; for example, when I am facing difficulty finishing some responsibilities, I will ask my intimate colleagues… You need to maintain good relationships with your colleagues if you want to have a better future in a Chinese organisation especially in our university" (Leader 2).

"Leaders are thinking about how to maintain the good relationship for keeping their positions rather than doing actual things" (Staff 7).

Additionally, the influence of the socialist culture was also referenced by the staff members:

"Two thirds of the members in our department are party members; there are many political activities. I am currently managing some of the events. I think we used to have low execution power. But nowadays, the efficiency has been improved. It is like a spiritual pillar" (Staff 4).

"The Party Branch Secretary is like a coordinator who guide us to learn thoughts from a political perspective" (Staff 2).

"The role of the Party Branch in the universities is ambiguous" (Staff 7).

As such, Staff 7 further supported the idea of de-administration by stating that:

"I really support this proposal and consider it a good thing. Academic teams and administrative teams are totally different. The administrative titles in the universities will be erased with the development, though it will not be achieved too soon especially in this district since the influence of the traditional culture and official standard thought in this district is so deep" (Staff 7).

4.5. The Department FL

4.5.1. Questionnaire Findings

Respondents' Basic Information

Table 4.34 Details the respondents and department members

Categories		Numbers
Leaders	(Associate) Heads of the Department	4
	(Associate) Party Branch Secretary	1
	Department/ Course Leaders	7
	Total	12
Staff	Professors	1
	Associate Professors	3
	Teaching Fellows	55
	Total	69
Number of Respondents		81
Number of the Department Members (excluding Administrators)		105
Respondent rate (%)		77.14%

The Conceptual Recognition of Distributed Leadership

Question 2

Table 4.35 The extent to which 'distributed leadership' is a known concept

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	5	4	3	0	12
Staff	30	24	12	3	69
Total	35	28	15	3	81
Rate (%)	43.2%	34.6%	18.5%	3.7%	100%

The findings suggest that most of the respondents in this department are not aware of the term at all or are aware of distributed leadership only to a small extent.

Question 3

Table 4.36 The conceptual understanding of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
A. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the department	Strong disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	3	6	7.4%
	Agree	9	61	70	86.4%
	Strongly agree	0	5	5	6.2%
B. Interactions between leader and the teacher, rather than workload delegation only are important	Strong disagree	0	2	2	2.5%
	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	9	46	55	67.9%
	Strongly agree	3	21	24	29.6%
C. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders;	Strong disagree	0	0	0	0

teachers are also involved in leadership practices such as decision-making	Disagree	2	5	7	8.6%
	Agree	9	60	69	85.2%
	Strongly agree	1	4	5	6.2%
Total respondents		12	69	81	100%

This table shows that almost all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the listed options, showing a good understanding of distributed leadership. The two tables above both suggest that there is a good understanding of distributed leadership although the term has not been fully recognised.

The Perception of the Extent of Distributed Leadership in this Department

Question 4

Table 4.37 The extent to which leadership is distributed

	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a great extent	Total respondents
Leaders	0	7	4	1	12
Staff	3	9	54	3	69
Total	3	16	58	4	81
Rate (%)	3.7%	19.8%	71.6%	4.9%	100%

The above Table implies that the majority of the respondents thought leadership within this department is distributed to some extent.

Question 5

Table 4.38 The extent to which leadership is distributed from seven dimensions

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	69	81	100%

A. Organisational structure	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.2%
	Disagree	6	5	11	13.5%
	Agree	6	59	65	80.2%
	Strongly agree	0	4	4	4.9%
B. Strategic vision	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	0	2	2.5%
	Agree	9	56	65	80.2%
	Strongly agree	1	13	14	17.3%
C. Values and beliefs	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	1	4	4.9%
	Agree	9	54	63	77.8%
	Strongly agree	0	14	14	17.3%
D. Collaboration and cooperation	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	0	3	3.7%
	Agree	7	52	59	72.8%
	Strongly agree	2	17	19	23.5%
E. Decision-making	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	3	6	7.4%
	Agree	9	52	61	75.3%
	Strongly agree	0	14	14	17.3%
F. Responsibility and	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0

accountability	Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Agree	6	45	51	63%
	Strongly agree	6	24	30	37%
G. Initiative (‘eager to’)	Strongly disagree	1	1	2	2.5%
	Disagree	2	14	16	19.8%
	Agree	9	50	59	72.8%
	Strongly agree	0	4	4	4.9%
H. Initiative (‘feel able to’)	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	10	21	31	38.3%
	Agree	2	46	48	59.3%
	Strongly agree	0	2	2	2.4%

The Table shows that most of the respondents thought that distributed leadership relates to and occurs within the dimension described whereas all the respondents thought that distributed leadership relates to and occurs within the dimension of responsibility and accountability. In keeping with the other three departments, there were more participants who thought that staff are eager to take on leadership roles than feel able to request responsibility.

The Mechanism of Distributed Leadership

Question 6

Table 4.39 The mechanism of distributed leadership

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	69	81	100%
A. Formal distribution	8	42	50	61.7%

B. Pragmatic distribution	2	6	8	9.9%
C. Strategic distribution	1	15	16	19.8%
D, Incremental distribution	1	6	7	8.6%
E. Opportunistic distribution	0	0	0	0
F. Cultural distribution	0	0	0	0
G. Others; please specify.	0	0	0	0

It can be seen that leadership in this department is mainly distributed through formal regulations and job descriptions. The mechanism of strategic distribution ranked the second.

The Cultural Dimensions which might influence the Distribution of Leadership

Question 7

Table 4.40 The cultural dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	69	81	100%
A. Worshipping the traditions	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	19	23	28.4%
	Agree	6	47	53	65.4%
	Strongly agree	2	3	5	6.2%
B. Adoring authority	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.2%
	Disagree	3	23	26	32%

	Agree	7	42	49	60.5%
	Strongly agree	1	4	5	6.3%
C. Stressing collectivism	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	4	7	8.6%
	Agree	9	62	71	87.7%
	Strongly agree	0	3	3	3.7%
D. Moral and ethical self-cultivation	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	10	14	17.3%
	Agree	0	54	54	66.7%
	Strongly agree	8	5	13	16%
E. Socialist elements	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	2	6	7.4%
	Agree	8	61	69	85.2%
	Strongly agree	0	6	6	7.4%
F. Enterprise	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	6	12	18	22.2%
	Agree	6	56	62	76.6%
	Strongly agree	0	1	1	1.2%
G. Patriarchy	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	6	14	20	24.7%
	Agree	6	54	60	74.1%
	Strongly	0	1	1	1.2%

	agree				

The Table shows that all the listed cultural dimensions are recognized as functioning in relation to distributed leadership. Additionally, none of the options were strongly disagreed with by the respondents. The options that were ticked the most as 'agree' and 'strongly agree' were the option of stressing collectivism and socialist elements. The option of worshipping the traditions and adoring authority were ticked by the fewest respondents although the proportions are still over half.

The Beneficial Effects of Distributed Leadership

Question 8

Table 4.41 The beneficial effects of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	69	81	100%
A. Organisational development of the department	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	2	3	3.7%
	Agree	10	56	66	81.5%
	Strongly agree	1	11	12	14.8%
B. Self-efficacy of staff	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	3	4	4.9%
	Agree	9	58	67	82.7%
	Strongly agree	2	8	10	12.4%
C. Improve student performance	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	4	7	8.6%

	Agree	9	58	67	82.6%
	Strongly agree	0	7	7	8.6%
*If there are others, please specify: None.					

Almost all the respondents held a positive view of the listed benefits of distributed leadership.

The Disadvantages of and Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Question 9

Table 4.42 The disadvantages and barriers of distributed leadership

		Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents		12	69	81	100%
A. Formal leaders may feel threatened	Strongly disagree	1	0	1	1.2%
	Disagree	6	36	42	51.9%
	Agree	5	31	36	44.5%
	Strongly agree	0	2	2	2.4%
B. It increases staff member's burdens but gives no extra authority	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	5	41	46	56.8%
	Agree	7	27	34	42%
	Strongly agree	0	1	1	1.2%
C. Staff have no interest in taking on leadership	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	3.7%
	Disagree	10	42	52	64.2%
	Agree	1	25	26	32.1%

roles	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
D. Financial incentives are necessary	Strongly disagree	0	1	1	1.2%
	Disagree	7	29	36	44.5%
	Agree	5	39	44	54.3%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
E. Distributing leadership may cause strained relationships	Strongly disagree	2	2	4	4.9%
	Disagree	6	39	45	55.6%
	Agree	4	28	32	39.5%
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	0
F. The central government system makes it hard to achieve	Strongly disagree	1	1	2	2.5%
	Disagree	3	17	20	24.7%
	Agree	7	48	55	67.9%
	Strongly agree	1	3	4	4.9%
*If there are others, please specify: None.					

Most of the respondents thought that financial incentives and centralised government system are the barriers to distributed leadership, whereas some of the respondents thought the rest of the four options (formal leaders may feel threatened, it increases staff's burdens but gives no extra authority, staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles, and strained relationships may be caused) were also disadvantages and barriers to distributed leadership.

How Leadership Skills are Developed

Question 10

Table 4.43 The way to develop leadership skills

	Leaders	Staff	Total	Rate (%)
Total respondents	12	69	81	100%
A. Leaders should create more leadership positions	8	35	43	53.1%
B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potential or ability	9	40	49	60.5%
C. Staff should be more involved in decision-making	11	52	62	76.6%
D. Formal leadership training should be provided	2	21	23	28.4%
E. Others; please specify. None.				

The table reveals that there were only some respondents who thought that formal leadership training should be provided, showing a low consciousness of the significance of leadership training. Additionally, there were majority of respondents who thought leaders should identify those with leadership potential and leaders should create more leadership positions.

Question 11

Table 4.44 Willingness to participate in interviews

	Yes	No	Total
Leaders	5	15	20
Staff	7	54	61
Total	12	69	81

Rate (%)	14.8%	85.2%	100%

The Table shows that amongst 81 respondents, 12 of them (5 leaders and 7 staff) were willing to be interviewed. Interviewees were then selected from these willing participants.

4.5.2. Interview Findings

4 5.2.1. Responsibility Description

The interviews reveal that the main responsibilities of staff in this department are teaching and researching. The organisational structure of this department is similar to that of the Department MP; it provides English core modules for all the university students, and professional courses for students majoring in language studies. Therefore, the teaching and researching groups of this department include public English teaching, English, Russian, Germany, Japanese, and Korean. There are four (Associate) Department Heads in total; besides their own teaching and researching, their main responsibilities are, respectively, to manage undergraduate teaching, researching and postgraduate teaching, public English teaching, and public English teaching in another campus. Instead of teaching and undertaking researching, the responsibility of the Associate Party Branch Secretary is the work of party building with both students and department members.

4.5.2.2. Departmental Situation

All the interviewees stated that the responsibility allocation in the department is according to the job titles. This was supported by Staff 2 who said that:

> *"There are different courses and teaching and researching groups which include public English teaching, English, Russian, Germany, Japanese, and*

Korean. The rules and principles in the positions and levels have been defined for many years" (Staff 2).

In the course of the leaders' interviews, Leader 1 also mentioned that he may distribute greater responsibilities to those individuals who display high leadership ability and capacity:

"Sometimes I see the leading ability of some staff; I will then try to discover their potential through allocating responsibilities to them. If I find him/her good at teaching/researching/leading, I will further cultivate him/her consciously" (Leader 1).

According to the leaders, other ways of selecting staff to take on responsibilities are according to their performance and ability (e.g. Professor or staff with a doctoral degree), staff member's interest and initiatives, and personal connection – the staff member who is close to leaders:

"It is according to the daily communication. The personal relationship is the basis of works which helps me to decide whom I can turn to when there is an 'emergency incident'; I choose the person who are easier to communicate with" (Leader 3).

Interview findings reveal that the organisational structure of the departments provide a variety of channels for staff members to get involved in the decision-making process:

"The meeting of the faculty congress is to discuss the big issues such as the changes of regulations and policies; a proposal needs to be voted on and can only be passed when most of or two thirds of the teachers vote 'yes'. We also have meetings of the academic committee, teaching committee, women's committee, and General Party Branch. We have a regular meeting for leaders and also have a weekly meeting for all the members on every Monday" (Leader 1).

"For example, we vote for the promotion and score for the leaders…" (Staff 1).

"Our teaching and researching group will have a meeting when the department meeting is cancelled. It is to discuss the issues regarding the teaching, exams etc." (Staff 2).

The reasons for the comparatively high extent of willingness in the questionnaire findings were found out through interviewing:

"We have many young teachers. Young people are more willing to take on responsibilities; I think it is an age issue" (Staff 4).

"Those teachers may think they have abilities or are not satisfied with the current situation. They hope their ideas can be put into actions and change the reality" (Staff 5).

Leaders within this department are highly supportive of staff taking on leadership responsibilities because of "the influence of Western culture" (Leader 2). Leaders are all good at speaking English and have visited Western countries; they demonstrate an open attitude to the sharing of leadership responsibilities. According to Leader 2, the way to encourage staff in this direction is to provide financial reward and opportunities for staff members to go abroad as visiting scholars. Despite this, amongst 7 staff there are still two interviewees who said they had no interest in leadership responsibilities, because of the "pressure of dealing with interpersonal relationships" (Staff 3) and the "feeling of losing the autonomy" (Staff 5).

The Relationship between Leaders and Staff

Both leaders and staff suggested that the relationship between them is quite good, although two staff members admitted that they can sometimes still feel the

existence of the hierarchical system. Additionally, the chances for communication between leaders and staff are rare:

"Teachers of public English may be comparatively closer to one another as they share the same teaching plan. But we (other teachers) deliver different courses; we leave after finishing our teaching duties" (Leader 2).

"We do have regular meetings every Tuesday, but I do not talk to leaders unless there is something particular to discuss. We share files and information in our online QQ group but it is not face-to-face" (Staff 3).

4.5.2.3. Benefits and Barriers

The Benefits

In the course of the interviews, it was found that sharing leadership responsibilities is beneficial for both individual and organisational development. Leaders explained that, through taking on leadership responsibilities, staff can gain a better understanding of the difficulties of leading, and of the departmental situation. It may bring about mutual understanding and high efficiency:

"Most of the leaders are administrators who do not teach and therefore will not be able to gain a good understanding on teaching and doing research. The regulations can be more reasonable when teachers take on leadership responsibilities" (Staff 5).

"High efficiency and there may be less twists and turns…" (Leader 1).

Staff claimed that it also helps them (the staff) to take more initiatives. Self-efficacy of staff members may be improved:

"Firstly, teachers will be able to understand the rationales for certain

regulations and policies. Sometimes they could not understand the reasons when they do not participate in taking on leadership responsibilities. Also, they will be more likely to understand us (leaders); it will be like a role-play. They will know our difficulties and therefore will be more willing to finish their work better. Thirdly, it also helps us to select the potential candidates who have the leadership potential to get promoted. I think this can also help to improve interdisciplinary communication as we are all studying languages and culture. This can be a big profit" (Leader 3).

"I think the more we get involved, the better. This is a process of self-improvement; we will be pushed to think more, make progress and find the solutions to the problems. Nothing will change and make progress if we are always lazy to use the brain. Taking on responsibilities is beneficial to not only the department but also to ourselves" (Staff 2).

"Teachers can feel a sense of responsibility and fulfilment. For them, it is an expression of self-value" (Staff 5).

Additionally, three staff members and one leader mentioned that students will also be benefited.

The Disadvantages and Barriers

Four interviewees (2 leaders and 2 staff) argued that the main concerns of taking on leadership responsibilities is that their ability as teachers may be negatively influenced. However, Staff 4 commented that:

"Sharing responsibilities does not mean taking on ALL the responsibilities. Teachers from the young generation are energetic and ambitious; energy will not be a problem" (Staff 4).

According to Leader 2 and Staff 4, staff's initiatives of getting involved in leadership responsibilities may be lessened due to limited financial reward.

Leader 3 also added that:

> *"When leaders allocate the responsibilities to certain staff members, it is hard to say whether the power and benefits are also received by the informal leaders. Sometimes it is like a risk sharing"* (Leader 3).

Interviewees also mentioned that distributing leadership might cause strained relationships:

> *"Teachers who teach different courses are likely to think about their own subjects more. Sometimes, their suggestions are not good for the whole organisational development, while the leaders can make decisions more quickly from the macro level"* (Staff 1).

> *"I think there may be communication problems. It may cause a misunderstanding. In addition, teachers may start to think about the money and then argue for it"* (Staff 6).

Another barrier to distributed leadership within this department is that the proportion female staff members is much higher than in any other departments. Staff 6 suggested that "female teachers are less likely to have the consciousness of taking on leadership responsibilities". Additionally, staff members were asked whether they think leadership in their department is autocratic. Almost all of them confirmed that leadership is not autocratic:

> *"It is not autocratic because we vote for the big things and we can complain"* (Staff 1).

> *"No. Based upon my understanding, we make the decisions together. Department Heads, Party Branch Secretaries, course leaders, and some professors all come to the meetings; it is like a team"* (Staff 3).

Even though, the deep influence of the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down

system was evident. As Leader 3 stated:

> *"The influence of the authority makes some teachers rely too much on the authority and [they] do not have the consciousness of participating in it; there is a lack of initiative. Another issue is that leadership model will also be deeply influenced by the government policies"* (Leader 3).

4.5.2.4. Leadership Skills

All the interviewees thought it is both necessary and important to improve leadership skills for all the staff. As Leader 1 explained:

> *"The leadership ability is linked with teaching ability…. Everything and every ability is connected. Teachers can organise their classroom better and teach better if their leadership abilities can be improved"* (Leader 1).

Although most respondents stated that there is no training provided, Leader 1 commented that the department sends 10 visiting scholars abroad each year. Exploring Western universities is considered a way of improving their leadership skills:

> *"Teachers need to get involved to improve their practical leadership abilities. It will not work if you just give them the lectures and send them the PowerPoint. Therefore, I always encourage teachers to go out and visit other universities"* (Leader 1).

> *"Give teachers more opportunities to be visiting scholars"* (Staff 1).

> *"In the workshop, colleagues who went abroad shared their life experiences and the advanced leadership concepts of Western countries"* (Staff 2).

4.5.2.5. Chinese Culture Elements

The respondents pointed out the deep influence of the traditional Chinese culture in the department and in this district:

> *"This has been deeply rooted in our mind and bones. I think the influence does exist, but has been gradually lessened by the opening-up policy"* (Staff 1).

> *"Our culture is very conservative and not open enough; we do not pay attention to critical thinking. We just follow the lead and respect the rules. This is influenced by the official standard thought. I think the reason is that our culture is not diverse enough; what I mean is that in our Chinese societies, we do not have people in different backgrounds and nationalities"* (Leader 2).

> *"I think the ideas of Confucian still plays an important role. The Western ideas focus on critical thinking; they encourage you to speak out your comments, though they may disagree with you. This is a way of renovation, while our culture focuses on obedience and respect. People are less likely to think about the opposite opinions and have the tendency to follow leaders' rules even though they are less efficient or wrong"* (Staff 5).

> *"The rigid stratification, obedience to authority, filial piety, and loyalty in Confucian culture ... Staff members should obey the demands of leaders"* (Staff 3).

As one of the moral doctrines in Confucianism, the doctrine of the mean thought (Zhongyong) was also mentioned by the interviewees:

> *"Our staff members are shy of doing this or doing that and then our problems cannot be solved… Another issue is that nobody would like to be the <u>first</u> person to say: "Let us apply for a research project or let us talk about the problem" ..."* (Leader 1).

In relation to Chinese cultural elements, collectivism was referenced by the

interviewees:

"It is hard for China to get rid of collectivism as we have so many people. Stressing individualism will cause disorder" (Staff 1).

"Collectivism means team work. Teachers are hard to work individually; we need to mutually help each other. For example, those teachers who teach public English to non-English major students always work together as a teaching group. I think this is great!" (Staff 2).

"[The] teaching and researching group emphasises complementation, cooperation, communication and sharing; perhaps this is the value of collectivism. I think each of the values has its pros and cons and so does collectivism; for its disadvantage, it disregards the human nature. Being a human is selfish and you want me to sacrifice myself to achieve [for] others…" (Staff 3).

Almost all the respondents suggested that collectivism has been lessened and replaced by individualism due to the flexibility of working in universities and the influence of the Western culture:

"Collectivism is not that important anymore; nevertheless, I really miss collectivism. In the past, people who did not participate in the meetings felt ashamed as they thought more about the group's development. Nowadays, individualism has become prevalent; teachers will just go back home if they do not want to participate in the regular meetings" (Leader 1).

"Collectivism has little influence. Nowadays, we stress individualism… People have become selfish since the reform and opening up policies… people are influenced by the foreign ideas" (Leader 2).

"The old teachers are more likely to stress collectivism whereas the young teachers prefer individualism. Some of the old teachers even have lost their

value of collectivism" (Leader 3).

"It is much easier to access to the Western ideology since China opened its doors. The media, the books and videos from foreign countries, and the prevalence of the internet…" (Staff 3).

Respondents posited that the Reform and Opening-up policy and the socialist market economy brings both rapid development of the economy and selfishness; personal interest is maximized, and seen as more important than the collective development. The differences in ideology between young and old generations were mentioned here, revealing the great change in Chinese society and Higher Education. As to the issue of adoring authority, Leader 1 pointed out that it is not authority that is respected. The importance of moral and ethical self-cultivation was addressed:

"We respect people who have both high morality and academic authority. The authority plus a rude, pretentious and arrogant characteristic will be despised; the respect of it is fake and temporary" (Leader 1).

In relation to de-administration, leaders in Department FL expressed their different opinions:

"Honestly, the aim of de-administration is just to give leaders more freedom. Nothing changes" (Leader 1).

"I think administrative power should not be fully erased as the motivation of the development will be lost. The current resource allocation is based upon the government; it is still a hierarchical system. The comprehensive de-administration will make the university lose resources. However, I think academic power does need to be improved; there should be more professors and experts to lead the universities" (Leader 3).

4.6. Interview Findings of the University Leaders

4.6.1. Responsibility Description

According to the university leaders, the Communist Party Secretary is mainly responsible for the ideological and political works of all the staff members within the university. Both (Associate) Principals and the (Associate) Communist Party Secretaries are involved in the decision-making process, but the Communist Party Secretary is more likely to make final decisions regarding the university development, policies, staff recruitment, etc. The university Principal then follows the guidance to carry out and allocates the work to the departments.

4.6.2. University Situation

The Principal had never heard of 'distributed leadership' but showed a good understanding of the concept during the interview. He did not describe the developmental situation of distributed leadership at the departmental level but showed a great interest in promoting distributed leadership within the university. However, the Principal further claimed that:

> *"Each university or department should be seen as a case, as they have different contexts and different developmental stages. None of the leadership models is appropriate within all the organisations; on the other hand, a leadership model may also be out of date with the development of an organisation. Therefore, its application depends on the situations"* (Principal).

The Community Party Secretary stated that distributed leadership has been existent and promoted through the meeting of the Faculty Congress, democratic voting system, and the supervision group made up of the representative staff. During the interviews, the leaders introduced four requirements of selecting potential (in)formal leaders - morality, ability, efforts, and achievements. The university Principal commented in their interview that:

"China has a very effective leadership system; we are always learning the ideas and knowledge from the top. I did not need to think about the answer when you asked me this question. It just came out" (Principal).

The university leaders are consciously of encouraging the staff to take on leadership responsibilities. As the Principal said, "leaders cannot do everything; staff may not be really interested in the leadership power and position but they need to make sure they have ways to speak up".

4.6.3. Chinese Cultural Elements, Benefits and Barriers

The question regarding the benefits and barriers of distributed leadership was asked but not answered. The Principal only mentioned that the loyalty and faithfulness common to the traditional Chinese culture may hinder the development of distributed leadership. This may link to the ideology of patriarchy, altruism, and adoring authority. The Communist Party Secretary claimed that "the influence of traditional culture has been lessened, while the influence of the 'system' is still great". The use of the 'system' here implies hierarchy and the political influence within Chinese universities. This political dimension was also addressed during interviews. According to the Principal:

"The role of the Communist Party Secretary is very important in the Chinese universities as they provide guidance from the perspectives of both politics and university development. They help the university to be united" (Principal).

4.6.4. Leadership Skills

The significance of improving the leadership skills for all staff was addressed; according to the leaders, training is provided for all the formal leaders each year through workshops and visiting other universities. However, a strategy to improve leadership skills for the staff was not mentioned.

4.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of both questionnaires and interviews with participants from four different departments, and with university leaders. The findings are presented department by department. The content of interview findings includes the aspects of responsibility description, departmental situation, the relationship between leaders and staff, benefits and barriers, and leadership skills.

In relation to the comparisons between data sets, the findings show that the main aim of the departments is to provide high quality of teaching and make more research achievements. However, the four case departments have different emphases on teaching and researching. For example, Department CE is known for good research achievements and has become the leading department of this university due to its high emphasis on research, while the proportion of teaching duties are higher than the proportion of doing research within Departments MP and FL. Likewise, although the two main responsibilities held by all the participants are teaching and researching, staff members within each department have their own unique subject features. For example, in Department CE, some staff members work in the labs; in Department MP, some staff members get involves in modelling contests. Numbers of staff members in EM have part-time jobs outside the university whereas above half of the teachers have oversea experiences. Another distinctive feature of Department FL is its high proportion of female staff members. These again resonate with the rationale for selecting the four case departments, showing the different subject culture of different departments.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses distributed leadership within four departments in a Chinese university by considering seven dimensions: the conceptual recognition of distributed leadership; the perception of the extent of distributed leadership; the mechanisms of distributed leadership; the beneficial effects of distributed leadership; the disadvantages of and barriers to distributed leadership; how leadership skills are developed; and the cultural dimensions related to the distribution of leadership. The findings of this research are analysed comparatively with the literature in this field.

5.2. The Conceptual Recognition of Distributed Leadership

Before carrying out this research into distributed leadership it was important to first establish the existence of distributed leadership, to any degree, and identify whether the concept of distributed leadership was recognised, amongst the participants. The conceptual recognition of distributed leadership was addressed mainly through the questionnaires in which respondents were asked to what extent they were aware of the term ‘distributed leadership’, and were given to identify how the respondents feel distributed leadership is best defined. The questionnaire findings show that, although the term, ‘distributed leadership’, may have not been fully recognised by all the respondents, most of them had a good understanding of the leadership model and understood its basic conceptual descriptions.

Within Department CE, the majority of respondents were not aware of the term at all, while most of the respondents within the Department MP recognised the term to a small extent or to some extent, as did the respondents from Departments EM and FL. These results above show that the term distributed leadership was not yet fully recognised by the members of the four departments.

However, this does not mean that the concept of distributed leadership was not understood. Although the term is not commonly known within the four departments, most of the respondents demonstrated a basic understanding of distributed leadership in that they held positive views of the conceptual descriptions given for the term. The core elements of distributed leadership have been presented by Harris (2013, p. 12) who wrote that distributed leadership "focuses upon the *interactions*, rather than the actions, of those in *formal and informal* leadership roles". It focuses on the involvement of informal leaders; however, this does not mean that everyone in the organisation leads, as leadership practice depends on a variety of situations (Spillane, 2012). These key concepts of distributed leadership were summarised within the three descriptive options of Question 3, which were all agreed or strongly agreed with by most of the respondents within the four departments.

The results of Question 3, option A reveal that both leaders and staff within the four departments recognised that leadership responsibilities are shared within the department, in keeping with common distributed leadership practices. These results are consistent with the interview findings; as a leader within the Department FL explained:

> *"I am influenced by the Western culture probably because of my major. I really hope staff members take more leadership responsibilities as leadership is to get involved. It is hard to lead when other staff members do not recognise that they are also part of it. I always encourage my secretary to take some leadership responsibilities; my job is to provide guidance"* (Leader 2, Department FL).

This leader not only realised the importance of sharing leadership responsibilities but also took actions to encourage staff members to engage in leadership. This is consistent with the argument of Gronn (2008 cited in Tian et al., 2016, p. 150), that formal leaders are not positioned as "an absolute authority, but more as a coordinator who utilized [utilises] others' expertise". Likewise, some of the staff members have also shown a good understanding regarding the roles of formal

leaders within distributed leadership:

> *"Leadership in practice should not be seen as a process of allocating workload and finishing the work that has been allocated. It is to give an instruction and guidance, coordinate and organise the organisation"* (Staff 2, Department EM).

> *"For leadership, I think we need someone who has a deep insight into coordination. What I mean is that we need both a team spirit and a 'core' (leader). This person should be able to motivate others to get involve and get us around"* (Staff 2, Department FL).

Corresponding with the interview transcripts, Harris (2013) and Duif et al. (2013) state that the tasks of formal leaders is to provide the precondition for a distributed leadership model to be implemented and developed, through showing initiative and making decisions, encouraging professionals to share resources and knowledge, acknowledging abilities, and providing direction and guidance.

A shift from the role of formal leader to that of informal leader, the *broad-based involvement,* is emphasised in discussion of leadership practice (Harris and Lambert 2003). Harris (2013) claims that leadership is constituted through the 'interactions' at various times and considered as 'a dynamic organisation' rather than the beliefs and actions of a leadership. The roles of both formal leaders and informal leaders are addressed within distributed leadership, and it is the significance of interaction, rather than the positions, that is discussed. The importance of interaction was expressed during the interview:

> *"It is beneficial to make the staff members involved in leadership responsibilities as the problems between people are mainly caused by the lack of interaction. Interaction and communication help to build mutual understanding and erase conflicts"* (Leader 1, Department FL).

The consideration of the dynamics of an organisation also leads the researcher to

identify the respondents' views on teachers' involvement in leadership practices such as decision-making. In interviews almost all the respondents addressed the importance of participating in the decision-making process. Some of them expressed their willingness to get involved in taking on leadership responsibilities, demonstrating the likelihood of a broad-based involvement in their departments. Although the barriers of the hieratical system were frequently mentioned, the organisational structure within the four case departments has provided a variety of channels for the staff members to engage with leadership practices, such as regular meetings, the establishment of information platforms, voting systems etc. In the course of interview, Staff 5 in Department FL showed her interest in leadership responsibilities by commenting on the decision-making process and giving her advices for the leaders:

> *"The leaders should use the bottom-up approach to gather more suggestions from the staff members. They should carry out the research by employing interviews and questionnaires to find the solution of the problems".*

The questionnaire findings and the arguments that have been mentioned above imply that although the term 'distributed leadership' was not fully recognised, the distributed leadership model in practice has been understood by the respondents within the four departments. Formal leaders recognised the importance of sharing leadership responsibilities and encouraging informal leaders to participate in the leadership responsibilities. The informal leaders showed their willingness to be involved, and the importance of interaction was also addressed. These arguments correspond with the main concepts of distributed leadership. The arguments above also reveal that the departmental situations within the four case departments are consistent with conceptual descriptions of distributed leadership in some way. The perception of the extent of distributed leadership is further explored in the following section.

5.3. The Perception of the Extent of Distributed Leadership

According to the questionnaire findings, most of the respondents thought that

leadership within each case department is distributed to some extent; the proportion of respondents who ticked the option 'to some extent' within Departments CE, MP, EM, and FL were 62%, 87.1%, 56.3%, and 71.6% respectively. These numbers imply that Departments MP and FL are more likely to have a higher extent degree of distributed leadership in place. In order to further identify the extent of distributed leadership, the departmental situations are explored. Based upon the seven dimensions of distributed leadership summarised by ESHA (2013), the relevant findings of both questionnaires and interviews are presented.

The questionnaire results reveal that, based upon the departmental situations, there were high proportions of respondents within four departments who thought that distributed leadership relates to and occurs within the seven dimensions; all seven were agreed or strongly agreed with by most of the respondents of the departments. Within Department MP and FL, five dimensions including strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision-making, and responsibility and accountability were marked positively in the questionnaire by all the respondents, showing the likelihood that a high extent of distributed leadership occurs within these dimensions. The results from Department EM provided no extreme answers, whereas the dimensions that gained the most positive responses within Department CE were strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, and responsibility and accountability. The results of this question within the four departments are consistent with the findings regarding the respondents' perception of the extent of distributed leadership that were covered earlier.

As summarised by Lu (2014, p. 30), organisational structure refers to "the agreed formal organisational structure that supports the distribution of responsibilities". The interviews show that the organisational structure of each of the four departments is quite similar. They are all well-defined and hierarchical. According to the questionnaire findings, the proportions of the respondents who agreed with the statement of organisational structure in Departments CE, MP, EM, and FL were 61.1%, 91%, 42.3%, and 80.2% respectively, whereas the

proportions of the respondents who strongly agreed with the statement were 7.4%, 5.1%, 22.5%, and 4.9% respectively. Compared with other three departments, the Department EM has a slightly lower extent of positive responses. Correspondent with the questionnaire findings, the interview transcripts from Department EM participants also reveal that, compared with the other three departments, the organisational structure is less likely to promote the distribution of responsibilities. According to the quotation, a course leader who is also defined as a formal leader, influenced by the hierarchical system, could still feel the influence of the power of those leaders who are in the higher positions. Duif et al. (2003) assert that formal structure can also be an obstacle to sharing responsibilities and decision-making. The transcripts imply that both the style of the formal leaders and the hierarchical system may be two of the barriers that cause Department EM's lower percentage of positive responses on organisational structure compared with the other three departments.

The barriers of a hierarchical system were also discovered within the other three departments. The word 'system' was frequently mentioned by respondents in discussing the roles and responsibilities that have been defined and the systematic process of allocating responsibilities. As NCSL (2004) highlights, organisational structure is mentioned as one of the factors that may inhibit the implementation and success of distributed leadership. Consistent with this standpoint, it seems that the hierarchy within the organisational structure of these departments may hinder the development of distributed leadership. However, the existence of hierarchy does not necessarily mean that it conflicts with distributed leadership. As Woods and Roberts (2016, p. 153) wrote:

> Formal authority may be hierarchical (i.e. relatively undistributed), yet in other ways flexibility, individual and group autonomy and cross-boundary working can be facilitated by institutional structures and the hierarchy may be more or less steep.

Correspondent with the argument above, interview findings reveal that the organisational structure of the departments does provide a variety of channels for

staff members to get involved in the decision-making process. The transcripts show that there are many regular meetings for staff members to participate in the decision-making progress and take on leadership responsibilities if they want to. The transcripts are in line with the argument of Harris (2013) who points out that structures and routines should be created to enable teachers to take on leadership responsibilities.

As one of the seven dimensions, decision-making means that "everyone is involved with decisions about the school's ambitions and expectations" (ESHA, 2013, p. 17). According to the questionnaire findings, the majority of respondents in all four departments held positive views on the statement, implying a high extent of distributed leadership in the dimension of decision-making. The proportion of the respondents who agreed with the statement of decision-making in Department MP was 100%, while Department FL gained the second highest proportion of positive responses. Compared with other three departments, Department EM had a slightly lower proportion of positive responses, much as with the previous dimension discussed. However, it should be noted that leaders still have the top priority on decision-making, although a variety of mechanisms for staff getting involve in decision-making can be identified from both the questionnaire and interview findings. As Hairon and Goh (2015) highlight, there is no limitless and unfettered decision-making power, although staff members are encouraged to take part. Interview respondents claimed that they "have those channels but doubt its application" (Staff 2, Department EM) and "do not give too many negative comments since the proposal are from the leaders" (Staff 3, Department MP). These statements are consistent with Hairon and Goh, "This truism may hold true in both western egalitarian and Asian hierarchical organisations, with the latter possibly being more restrictive and bounded than the former" (p. 708). The reason underneath may be a culture issue which will be further discussed later.

Strategic vision refers to "a shared vision with common values for all" (ESHA, 2013, p. 17). The questionnaire findings show that, in line with the questionnaire findings of decision-making, the majority of respondents held positive views on

the statement of strategic vision, although Department EM still had a slightly lower extent of positive responses. Department MP gained 100% positive responses, whereas Department FL ranked the second, with only two leaders disagreeing with the statement. In the course of interviews, there appears to be a general view that the main aim of the departments is to provide high quality of teaching and make more research achievements, whereas the main responsibilities of staff are teaching and researching. Nevertheless, the four case departments have different extents of emphases on teaching and researching. For example, the proportion of teaching duties are higher than the proportion of doing research within Departments MP and FL. Maths and Physics are two core modules for all the science students within Chinese universities, while English is a core module for all the university students. Teachers in these two departments therefore need to deliver both professional courses for students majoring in specialist subjects, and public courses for other students. Department CE is known for good research achievements; the interviews indicate that the reason the Department has become the leading department of this university is due to its high emphasis on research:

"I personally think different leaders focus on different aspects, which leads to different developmental situations. For our department, I think our leaders think teaching is more important than doing research" (Staff 3, Department MP).

"The university ranking is based upon the researching rather than teaching. Although we are processing our teaching assessment, it is hard to quantify its quality; there is no standard to value teaching abilities" (Leader 2, Department EM).

"Unfortunately, our researching ability is weaker than those science departments as we have limited funding from the government. The country focuses more on the development of science subjects rather than social science and humanities" (Staff 2, Department FL).

The dimension of values and beliefs aims to explore the organisational culture, for example aspects such as high expectations, confidence, and mutual respect (ESHA, 2013). The questionnaire findings for this dimension are similar to the findings for strategic vision and decision making; the majority of the respondents across the four departments held positive views on the given statement regarding values and beliefs, although compared with the other three departments, Department EM still has a slightly lower number of positive responses. Department MP gained 100% positive responses and Department FL ranked second, with only four leaders disagreeing with the statement. The participants' view on the presence of this dimension in their departments are also be reflected in the interview responses regarding the relationship between leaders and staff in the department. All the respondents claimed that the relationship between leaders and staff is harmonious. However, there were some complaints beneath the harmonious relationship. For example, a few staff members mentioned that they could still feel the presence of the hierarchical system. Additionally, respondents pointed out that within the university, there are limited chances for leaders and staff to communicate:

> *"Teachers manage their own business and leave after their lectures"* (Leader 2, Department EM).

> *"The communication between staff members is limited as they teach different courses and do not need to come to the university when they have no lectures"* (Leader 2, Department FL).

> *"Some teachers live quite far away; we barely see each other…"* (Staff 1, Department CE).

The transcriptions show that there is a loose and autonomous environment in the departments. As Harris (2008) proposes, leadership in Higher Education is distant, as geographic dispersion and separation challenge the team and individuals to gather around and solve the problems. Knight and Trowler (2000) also argue that the loss of collegiality may be caused by less time spent actually working in the

university. Consistent with the arguments of Harris, and Knight and Trowler, the transcripts reveal that leadership in the four case departments does have the problem of being separated or disconnected from the rest of the staff and a subsequent lack of communication, though there has been a harmonious relationship. Dispersion and separation may also hinder collaboration and partnership as it poses a challenge which individuals and teams must work together to solve (Harris, 2008). This argument guides the researcher to subsequently look at the situation of collaboration and cooperation.

Collaboration and cooperation aims to check whether "staff work collaboratively in order to improve school results" (ESHA, 2013, p. 17). According to the questionnaire findings, the majority of the respondents held positive views on the existence of collaboration and cooperation in their departments. In keeping with earlier results, Department MP still yielded 100% positive responses, while Department FL ranked second, with three leaders disagreeing. Compared with other dimensions, this dimension had higher proportions of the respondents who 'strongly agreed' with the description. It seems that although there is a problem of dispersion, the extents of cooperation are still high in the departments. In line with the questionnaire findings, both leaders and staff members during the interviews also suggested this high level of cooperation within the four departments:

> *"The public courses enable us to meet in the teaching and research office, wherein teachers communicate their ideas and share their course slides. Everyone within the group likes to talk about it as we are using the same book to teach the same public courses. This helps to improve the quality of teaching quality"* (Leader 1, Department MP).

> *"The relationship between leaders and staff within the universities is like a win-win cooperation; from the bottom-up perspective, staff members can bring cooperation for the department whereas from the top-down perspective, leaders can use their resources and personal relationship to gain the useful information for the staff member"* (Staff 2, Department EM).

The two quotations above present two different types of cooperation. Spillane (2012) conceptualises three main types of co-performance approach to distribution; collaborative distribution, collective distribution, and coordinated distribution. The co-performance example in the first transcript is more likely to fit into the category of collaborated distribution, which refers to leadership practice that has multiple leaders working together in the same routine, time and place (Spillane, 2012). The first quotation illustrates a situation of teaching cooperation wherein everyone is involved in the process and contributes, consistent with collaborative distribution, which places more emphasis on communication as there is "more heedful interrelating among leaders" (p. 61). The second quotation demonstrates the features of coordinated distribution which characterises leadership practice that has multiple leadership activities and routines with a particular order and sequence (Spillane, 2012).

The dimensions of responsibility and accountability examines whether staff members feel that they are responsible for their performances, tasks and work (ESHA, 2013). According to the questionnaire findings, it is noted that the proportions of the respondents in Departments CE and EM who held negative views on the statement regarding responsibility and accountability were only 12.7% and 22.2% respectively, whereas both Departments MP and FL gave 100% positive responses, implying high extents of distributed leadership in the dimension of responsibility and accountability. Consistent with the questionnaire results, the interview transcripts also reveal a high degree of responsibility and accountability when the respondents were asked to describe their responsibilities. One of the particular reasons for this was discovered especially in Department CE. When asked the reason for the arguments, the respondents claimed it is because of collectivism (the influence of the collectivism will be further examined in section 5.8.).

The researcher infers that a high extent of feeling responsible may be linked with the staff members' initiative, and therefore the results of initiative are presented here as the last dimension. According to ESHA (2013, p. 17), initiative aims to

identify whether staff members are able to "contribute their own ideas and come up with initiatives". Questionnaire respondents were asked two questions to identify whether they are willing to and feel able to take on responsibilities. The findings suggest that the number of respondents who thought that staff members were eager to take on leadership roles was higher than the number of respondents who thought staff members feel able to request responsibilities. The proportions of the respondents in Departments CE, MP, EM and FL who 'agreed' that they are eager to take on leadership roles, were 73.1%, 58.3%, 69%, and 72.8% respectively, whereas the proportions of the respondents who 'agreed' that staff members feel able to request responsibilities were 56.5%, 52.8%, 50.7%, and 59.3% respectively. The data regarding the proportions of the respondents who 'strongly agreed' with the two options follows a similar pattern. It indicates that more staff members feel eager to take on leadership responsibilities than feel able to actually do so.

This issue was followed up in the interviews to identify the underlying reasons for this disparity. Firstly, in the course of interviews, staff members were asked whether they would like to take on leadership responsibilities. The results of this question vary between the departments. Amongst 9 staff members in Department CE, only 2 interviewees expressed no interest in taking on leadership responsibilities, whereas within Department MP, although there are opportunities to take on responsibilities, most staff claimed that they have no interest in doing so. Within Department EM, only 1 staff member showed interest in taking on responsibilities, while three respondents preferred not to get involved. There were also three staff members who gave neither positive responses nor negative responses. Amongst 7 staff members in Department FL, there were two interviewees who said they had no interest in leadership responsibilities, because of the "pressure of dealing with interpersonal relationships" (Staff 3, Department FL) and the "feeling of losing autonomy" (Staff 5, Department FL).

The proportion of interviewees who expressed themselves willing to take on leadership responsibilities is therefore lower than the proportion amongst questionnaire respondents who stated the same. The reasons for the

comparatively high extent of willingness in the questionnaire findings were found out through interviewing:

"Let me calculate… I think roughly one third of the staff members have participated in sharing the responsibilities" (Leader 3, Department MP).

"The people who work in academia have something in common; they have a sense of responsibility and participation. They like to discuss the affairs of the country, working environments, or department development; they want to comment and change things…" (Staff 2, Department EM).

As mentioned earlier, the number of respondents who thought that they are able to take on leadership responsibilities is notably lower in interview than questionnaire respondents. Therefore, the gap between these two sets of answers was mentioned to the interviewees in order to ask the reasons. The interviewees suggested that the possible reasons may include a contrast between more people and less opportunities, the influence of the Chinese culture, and the different understandings of 'taking on leadership responsibilities':

"Firstly, we have so many people but there are limited positions and chances; Secondly, thinking and taking action are two different things. Some people like to think that they are interested but will feel reluctant to actually take on the responsibilities when you truly ask them to do so" (Leader 2, Department MP).

"One of the personality traits of Chinese people is 'waiting', they have get used to being led by someone, and always prefer to wait for others to ask first and are ambivalent to take initiative to be the first person. There is a conflict that we (leaders) always hope there will be someone who ask to take on responsibilities first while staff members always hope leaders will speak out first" (Leader 1, Department FL).

"Staff members may misunderstand the meaning of taking on leadership responsibilities. They are thinking about the power, positions and benefits that

leadership can bring for them rather than actually wanting to take on the detailed and trivial leadership responsibilities" (Leader 3, Department FL).

Likewise, leaders were also asked whether and how they encourage staff to get involve in taking on responsibilities. The main strategies that were mentioned by leaders are praise and rewards.

To sum up, the findings above show that leadership within the four case departments has been distributed to some extent. The questionnaire findings are correspondent with the interview findings; they both reveal that in the four case departments, the extent of distributed leadership ranking from higher to lower are Departments MP, FL, CE and EM respectively. The environment for distributed leadership has already been established; the organisational structures enable leadership to be distributed, and there are channels for staff to participate in the decision-making process. However, leadership styles and the hierarchical system may hinder the distribution of leadership, especially in Department EM. As regards strategic vision, the main aim of the departments is to provide a high quality of teaching and achieve more in the research field, whereas the main responsibilities of staff are teaching and research, though the departments have different extents of emphases on teaching and research. The relationship between leaders and staff in the departments is harmonious, though some staff members could still feel the existence of the hierarchical system and feel that there should be more opportunities for leaders and staff to communicate. Likewise, there are high extents of collaboration and cooperation within the four departments. The findings also indicates that staff members express more eagerness to take on leadership responsibilities than they express feeling able to do so.

5.4. The Mechanisms of Distributed Leadership

The questionnaire findings regarding the mechanisms of distributed leadership vary more between the four departments than any of the questions so far considered. Most of the respondents in Departments CE and FL ticked the statement of formal distribution, showing that they consider leadership within

these two departments to be distributed through designated jobs and roles descriptions (NCSL, 2004). The formal distribution statement was the most ticked by Department EC (47.9%), falling just shy of half of that department's respondents, while in the Department MP, there are only 15.4% of the respondents who thought that formal distribution was the mechanism evident within their department.

The interviews provide deeper insight into the mechanisms of distributed leadership within the departments. ESHA (2013) claims that the leading features of formal distribution are formal job descriptions and pre-regulated roles. Although there were fewer questionnaire respondents from Department MP who ticked the formal distribution statement, all the interviewees within the Department claimed that responsibilities are allocated according to the job titles. Consistent with the questionnaire findings, the interviewees within the other three departments verified that leadership is distributed mainly through the pre-regulated positions and roles. The transcripts show that, in line with the description of formal distribution, the Principal of the organisation delegates leadership responsibilities; the organisation structures and leadership roles are already formally designated.

The mechanism of formal distribution exists not only at the departmental level but also works at the university level. The interviews with university leaders suggested that these leaders have defined roles and positions; the boundaries of their responsibilities are clearly visible. For example, the Communist Party Secretary is mainly responsible for the ideological and political works of all the staff members within the University. Both (Associate) Principals and the (Associate) Communist Party Secretaries are involved in the decision-making process, but the Communist Party Secretary is more likely to make final decisions regarding the university development, policies, staff recruitment, etc. The university Principal then follows the guidance and allocates the work to the departments to carry it out. This is consistent with the argument of MacBeath (2009) who explains that within formal distribution, the boundaries of accountabilities and responsibilities are obvious. In the course of the interviews,

there appeared to be a general view that this model has been accepted by both leaders and staff members and is seen as an efficient leadership approach. In line with the interview results, NCSL (2004, p. 37) also points out the advantages of formal distribution and its important role, although the quotation is based upon a school (not university) context:

> This formal process of distribution has the advantage of lending security, not only to staff who occupy those formal roles but also to other staff who know where they stand. Parents know who it is they should speak to on any given issue, and efficient management seems to be the key to an experience that meets the expectations of all groups of stakeholders. Such formal distribution may be a necessary precondition for any more radically developmental journey on which a school might embark.

The transcripts and the argument of ESHA both show that to a certain degree, the theory of distributed leadership from the school context can be seen as corresponding with the situation of distributed leadership within Higher Education.

As MacBeath (2009) highlights, leadership within an organisation does not 'fit neatly into' a certain mechanism, although leadership is generally considered as developing from formal distribution to cultural distribution. Corresponding with this argument, in the questionnaire results the statements describing pragmatic distribution, strategic distribution, and incremental distribution were also ticked by different proportions of the respondents in the four departments. This reveals the co-existence of different mechanisms within each department. As Leader 2 within Department MP mentioned, the allocation is level by level, but he further suggested that responsibilities may be directly allocated to certain staff in the case of a special or urgent situation. This statement is in line with the description of pragmatic distribution, which refers to leadership distribution through "often/necessary ad hoc delegation of workload" (NCSL, 2004, p. 35).

In the questionnaire findings we see that Department MP has the most

respondents (42.3%) ticking the option of pragmatic distribution rather than formal distribution, a significant difference to the other three departments. This leads the researcher to speculate that the mechanism of distributed leadership within this department may have developed into pragmatic distribution. In keeping with the questionnaire results, the demanding or urgent situations mentioned by Leader 2 in Department MP were also addressed by the interview respondents. As MacBeath (2009) mentions, the difference between pragmatic distribution and other forms is temporary and immediate in nature, this feature can be reflected from the quotations in Department MP:

> *"There are two kinds of work; the regular work will be allocated to certain teachers according to their roles. For example, the Maths or Physics competitions, and the Mathematical contests in modelling. When there are also some temporary but urgent responsibilities, we will need to find some teachers quickly and ask them to take on responsibilities"* (Leader 3, Department MP).

MacBeath (2009) wrote that in an environment with high stakes and pressures, to ensure safety and avoid courting failures by inexperienced staff, it is pragmatic for leaders to do a cost-benefit analysis to choose the *right* person, who is judged as displaying knowledge and ability to finish the tasks and handle these temporary situations. This is reflected in the above transcripts, particularly by the statement, "we will need to find some teachers quickly…" (Leader 3, Department MP). In this case, the researcher followed up with a further question as to what kind of staff member the leader would select to take on responsibilities. Leaders suggested that the main ways of selecting staff to take on responsibilities are according to their performance and ability (e.g. Professor or staff with a doctoral degree), staff members' interests and initiatives, and personal connection – the staff member who is close to leaders. The transcription of Leader 2 in Department MP also reveals that young teachers are likely to be allocated to take on extra responsibilities; however, the young staff members may have no willingness to do so. Hatcher (2005) explains that distributed leadership may be used as a political mechanism to manipulate staff into taking on extra workload; in keeping with this, complaints regarding use of this strategy

by leaders were recorded in interview with staff members in Department EM.

The quotations suggest that certain staff members in the Department have been asked to take on a disproportionate amount of extra work, which causes their unwillingness to get involve in leadership responsibilities and may become one of the barriers to the distribution of leadership. In this sense, the leaders' intention of asking staff members to take on leadership responsibilities may be not for the staff members' individual development but for their own benefit. As Tian et al. (2016, p. 151) point out:

> Johnson (2004) warned that distributed leadership might be camouflaged as a micro-political strategy to rationalize top-down management. Thus, how leadership would be distributed might be manipulated, and distribution might serve some people's interest only.

It is noted that although this issue may also exist within the other three departments, the quotations referenced above were all from Department EM. As mentioned earlier, there was only 1 staff member within this Department who showed an interest in taking on additional responsibilities. Being 'forced' to take on more responsibilities may be one of the possible reasons for the lower perception of distributed leadership in Department EM.

Spillane and Camburn (2006) propose that leadership can be understood from designed organisation and lived organisation; designed organisation is about the formal structure of an organisation reflected in committee structures, whereas lived organisation refers to the practical issues happening in daily operations. According to Spillane and Camburn, designed organisations reflect the intentions and values of leaders, whereas a lived organisation reflects those of staff. This marries with the situation mentioned above - within the department, the strategy of asking young teachers to take on responsibilities was considered a good thing by leaders while staff members complained about it. This contrast and ambivalence helps to address the importance of understanding organisational leadership from the perspectives of both designed and lived organisations, and

indicates that although some leaders "genuinely believed that they were distributing leadership, the feedback from teachers and support staff suggested this was not the case" (Harris, 2013, p. 13).

According to the university leaders, there are four main requirements when selecting potential (in)formal leaders - morality, ability, efforts, and achievements. The university Principal commented in their interview that He "did not need to think about the answer when you asked me this question. It just came out" (Principal). This shows that the issues that have been defined and systematic within the departments and in this university include not only the positions, responsibilities and regulations, but also the procedure of selecting individuals with potential to take on more. Likewise, the interviews also present a strict and defined assessment system which is used to quantify the staff members' teaching and researching performance. The interview statement from Leader 2 in Department EM (see p.206) reveals that the imperfection of the assessment system has pushed the staff members to focus more upon the numbers rather than the qualities associated with the work they perform, and has hindered the distribution of leadership within the departments. This issue can also be seen as one of the reasons for some staff members' unwillingness to participate in leadership responsibilities. Lumby (2013) considers power as a commodity which flows in different directions but with no absolute, as it will be strengthened in practice or hindered by barriers. Those barriers may come from other authorities such as district, local authority and government, or legal constraints and even the professional community. Corresponding with the argument of Lumby, this statement suggests that policy can become one of the barriers to distributed leadership.

Moving back to the questionnaire findings, it is notable that the statement relating to incremental distribution was also selected by high proportions of respondents in Departments FL and MP. According to NCSL (2004), as the third mechanism of distributed leadership, incremental distribution is 'strategic but with a "pragmatic ad hoc quality" aiming at growing individuals' ability and capacity' (p. 13). In keeping with the questionnaire findings, clues to the

presence of incremental distribution can also be discovered from the leaders' interviews in the Department FL. As ESHA (2013) highlights, in incremental distribution, staff are offered a platform to prove their ability and hence will have more chances to lead, when leaders relinquish more of the responsibilities to competent individuals. Corresponding with this argument, this statement suggests the existence of incremental distribution within Department FL and simultaneously suggests that leadership within an organisation does not 'fit neatly into' a certain mechanism (MacBeath, 2009).

There are two main ways to distribute power: top-down and bottom-up approaches. The results shown so far above indicate that within the four departments, leaders are playing the crucial role in establishing distributed leadership. This is consistent with the top-down approach; the models of formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, and incremental distribution can all be categorised as top-down approaches. Lumby (2013) describes the top-down approach as "someone distributes the power to act", emphasising that leaders play an important role in shaping and creating distributed leadership (p. 585). In contrast, the bottom-up approach enables staff to empower leaders. The emphasis of leadership roles shifts from a formal leader's behaviours to the actions of informal individuals (NCSL, 2004). Within the four case departments it is less commonly found that the initiative comes from the bottom; the emphasis of leadership roles is still on formal leader's behaviours rather than the actions of informal individuals. As such, it is noted that the mechanisms of distributed leadership within the four departments are still top-down approaches, showing that the phases of distributed leadership with the four case departments are still developing and still needs time to cultivate the environment and culture which enables the staff members to display their potentialities for leadership.

5.5. The Beneficial Effects of Distributed Leadership

The literature review suggests that there is an abundant body of research which demonstrates that distributed leadership can make contributions to organisational improvement (Bolden et al., 2009; Harris, 2004 and 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006,

2007 and 2009a). Consistent with the literature, the questionnaire findings show that almost all of the questionnaire respondents in the four departments thought that distributed leadership helps to improve organisational development. During the interviews, the interviewees were also asked to express their opinion in detail of how staff members taking on additional leadership responsibilities benefits the departments. The interview findings are in line with the questionnaire results; all the interviewees agreed that distributed leadership makes contributions to departmental development. This can be shown by the following selected statement:

> *"When a teacher who has abundant experiences takes on leadership responsibilities, she/he could help to make the more reasonable policies through using her/his understanding and practical knowledge. For example: giving us a more rational assessment system. The problem regarding the focus of the policy can cause more problems. Teachers may prefer to gain the assessment scores by publishing in certain journals which are defined as having scores to get, rather than other journals which are even better but have not been included into the score system yet"* (Leader 2, Department MP).

Apart from revealing the benefits of distributed leadership, the statements above make frequent mention of what the interviewees perceive as unreasonable policies. As Staff 5 in Department FL suggested, the policy-makers are administrators rather than teachers, implying the lower positions of academic power. This corresponds with the argument of Du (2014) who highlights that the administrative power in Chinese Higher Education is stronger than academic power. As Du explains, due to the hierarchical leadership approach, power is centralised within positions of administrators and senior leaders. The leader selection system is led by administrators. It is therefore more likely that administrators will be selected to become leaders rather than professional academics with clear achievements and qualifications; this somehow weakens the academic power within Chinese universities (Du, 2014). This issue as expressed by Du is clear from the transcriptions, which both reveals the unbalance of leadership powers and the urgent need of improving academic

power in Chinese Higher Education.

According to the questionnaire findings, most of the respondents also thought distributed leadership can help to improve staff members' self-efficacy. In parallel with the questionnaire results, Edwards (2014) wrote:

> Snell and Swanson found that teachers who emerged as leaders have developed high level skills in the areas of expertise (strong pedagogical and subject knowledge) collaboration (working with other teachers, reflection on their own practice and empowerment of themselves and others) (p.61)

whereas

> Katzenmeyr and Moller also suggest that empowering teachers to take on leadership roles enhances teachers' self-esteem and work satisfaction, which in turn leaders to higher levels of performance due to higher motivation, as well as possibly higher levels of retention in their profession (p.74).

The positive correlation between distributed leadership and staff members' efficacy can be seen in both the quotations of Edwards and of the transcripts. Both leaders and staff in the interviews agreed that distributed leadership is beneficial in improving the self-efficacy of staff members:

> *"Leaders can feel less burdened with the workloads when teachers share with them while teachers can also improve their leadership abilities through getting involved in practical challenges. It is also good for their personal growth"* (Leader 3, Department CE).

> *"Teachers can feel a sense of responsibility and fulfilment. For them, it is an expression of self-value"* (Staff 5, Department FL).

These interview quotations are consistent with the statement of ESHA (2013, p.15) who wrote:

> Participating school leaders provided an infrastructure where it was safe to try things out, to innovate with new ways of working. Staff responded to this opportunity positively. It has affected the way they saw themselves as professionals and improved their sense of self-efficacy. This, in turn, had a positive impact on the way they interacted with pupils and other staff members in the schools.

The transcripts also show that leaders claimed that staff members do not understand their hardships while staff members complained about the current regulations made by leaders. There seems to be a misunderstanding between leaders and staff members which may be solved or reduced by the distribution of leadership.

There have been more and more empirical studies which suggest that distributed leadership can make contributions to student performance (Day et al., 2007; Bowen and Bateson, 2008; Harris, 2013; Revai and Schnellbach, 2013). Harris (2013, p. 110) said that, "there is a perception that distributed leadership has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning which have in turn been converted into positive student learning outcome". Corresponding with the arguments above, most of the questionnaire respondents agreed that distributed leadership is beneficial to the student performance. This is also borne out in the interviews. It is noted that although the positive correlation between distributed leadership and student performance was mentioned by several interviewees; they pointed out that the influence is indirect and takes a long time to become visible.

5.6. The Disadvantages of and Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Harris (2013) notes that when staff members perceive leadership distribution as delegation, they may be less willing to take on those leadership responsibilities, as they create tension with their identity as a teacher. As such, the questionnaire findings show that distributed leadership is most likely to be seen as delegation in Department MP; most of the questionnaire respondents in Departments CE,

EM, and FL showed their willingness to take on leadership responsibilities by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that staff have no interest in taking on leadership roles, while the respondents in Department MP considered staff members' interest (or lack thereof) as one of the barriers to distributed leadership. The questionnaire findings are consistent with the interview findings (see 5.3.); for example, within Department MP, most staff claimed that they have no interest in taking on leadership responsibilities. The respondents who expressed their reluctance to get involved, gave their reasons as follows:

> *"I am interested but I already have too much pressure due to the promotion and huge amount of research work. I need to write many papers to get promoted and have spent most of my time doing so. I may have interest in leadership responsibilities if there is no pressure at all. Unfortunately, I am too old to have enough energy for everything"* (Staff 6, Department MP).

> *"I am aged fifty; I am too old to have the ambition of becoming a department leader. I am busy working outside of the university. Also, leaders do not like me to have ambition toward leadership. It is meaningless to create initiatives if they do not ask me to do so"* (Staff 7, Department EM).

The interviewees of the first and third extracts above both express that taking on leadership responsibilities is hindered by age, by pressure and by the burden of their workloads. NCSL (2004) argues that the feeling of being put under significant pressure can be one of the reasons for decreased willingness; "when there's so much pressure on teachers in the school they will definitely avoid taking leadership responsibilities" (p. 37). Besides, the second and third extracts point out the influence of interpersonal relationship and the doctrine of the mean thought respectively, revealing that certain aspects of traditional Chinese culture can also be barriers to distributed leadership. This assumption is also shown in the questionnaire results; a questionnaire respondent in Department CE added that modesty, one of the Chinese traditions, may hinder the achievement of distributed leadership. In line with the results of both questionnaires and

interviews, Harris (2004, p. 19) wrote that, it is the "*cultural* and *micro political* barriers operating in schools that make distributed forms of leadership difficult to implement".

MacBeath (2005 cited in Leithwood et al., 2009a, p. 236) wrote:

> Good teachers are already busy and may be reluctant to take on new functions. They come to the job focused on working with their students rather than with other adults and may easily conclude that additional leadership responsibilities will only erode the time they have for their students.

In line with the argument of Macbeath, most of the staff members did admit that they thought taking on leadership responsibilities would affect their ability as a teacher. However, there were several teachers holding opposite opinions:

> *"We only do this (taking on responsibilities) during our spare time. Teaching and doing research are certainly the top priorities while other things do not take too much time (because) responsibilities are shared with the many, not a few"* (Staff 5, Department MP).

> *"Sharing responsibilities does not mean taking on ALL the responsibilities. Teachers from the young generation are energetic and ambitious; energy will not be a problem"* (Staff 4, Department FL).

The quotations show that whether taking on leadership responsibilities would affect their ability as a teacher or not depends on the individual's personal situation such as workload, age, the ability in time management etc. Within the transcripts, it is noted that Staff 2 in Department EM also mentioned that the border between the powers and the responsibilities that have been taken by informal leaders is blurred and ambiguous; they pointed out the advantages of the ambiguous border, while its disadvantages of it were also identified within the research. As Ritchie and Woods (2007) argue, distributed leadership may increase the responsibilities and burdens of teachers, but at the same time the

power is not shared with those informal leaders. This situation may be seen as more strongly evident in Asian hierarchical contexts. Jiang (2011) demonstrates that in Taiwan, legislation has encouraged teachers to participate in leadership activities, while there is no legal protection for their rights and interests; this grey area appears to cause apathy among teachers as regards sharing or taking on additional responsibilities. This statement was supported by most of the questionnaire respondents in Departments MP and EM, and 43.5% and 43.2% of the respondents in Departments CE and FL respectively. During the interviews, several interviewees were also concerned about this issue. The questionnaire and interview responses show that distributed leadership may increase staff members' burdens but gives them no extra authority. To encourage teachers to participate in leadership responsibilities, there should be not only the legislation and formal leaders' intention, but the rights and interests of informal leaders should also be guaranteed during the process of distributing leadership.

The researcher further sought to identify whether monetary reward is provided for informal leaders to guarantee their interests. According to the questionnaire findings, 49% of the respondents in Department CE and most of the respondents in Departments MP, EM and FL thought that financial incentives are necessary to encourage teachers to get involved. Financial budget can become one of the barriers to distributed leadership as the monetary reward for formal leaders may bring extra cost for the organisations. As Harris (2004, p. 20) highlights:

> There are financial barriers as formal leadership positions in schools carry additional increments. Consequently, to secure informal leadership in schools will require heads to use other incentives and to seek alternative ways of remunerating staff who take on leadership responsibilities.

Considering this, interviews questions were then followed up to examine the departmental situations regarding the budgets, through asking the interviewees whether the participation of informal leaders would have an influence on department budget. The interviews reveal that although some of the leaders claimed that they encourage staff to take on responsibilities through oral praise

and monetary reward, there is almost no financial incentive for staff to get involved, as the budget remains the same regardless of the number of people undertaking the responsibilities. As Staff 1 in Department CE said, "We do not think about the reward. The department will give a little bit of money but it is tiny". This is supported by a leader who stated that "we would like to reward [staff for taking on leadership] with money, but everybody within this department knows that our budget is tight" (Leader 2, Department CE). Therefore, the results show that although both leaders and staff members suggested that monetary reward is necessary for the informal leaders, financial budgets will not be influenced by the distribution of leadership within the four departments as there is no financial reward provided for informal leaders. However, the underlying problem is that staff members may have less willingness to take on leadership activities.

Formal leaders can also become one of the barriers to distributed leadership. According to Harris (2013) and Leithwood et al. (2009a), when distributed leadership is perceived as an erosion of power, formal leaders may feel threatened and therefore prevent the implementation of distributed leadership. As Harris (2013, p. 49) further explains:

> Distributed leadership may be considered too threatening to those in formal power positions, not only in terms of ego and perceived authority, but also because it places leaders in a vulnerable position, as they have to relinquish direct control over certain activities.

Corresponding with the argument above, the questionnaire findings show that the majority of the respondents in the four departments thought that formal leaders may feel threatened by the distribution of leadership. However, when the departmental situation was further explored through interviews, this tendency was only found within Department MP. NCSL (2004) suggests that some head teachers admit that they feel anxious and worried when other members become too independent, and this makes them think it necessary to take control and establish their authority. Although when looking at the questionnaire results from

leaders, most in Departments MP and FL disagreed with this statement, the researcher does find that leaders within Department MP were trying to take control during the distribution of leadership. As mentioned earlier, compared with other three departments, the staff members within Department MP demonstrate less initiative to take on leadership responsibilities. Formal leaders may be one of the reasons for their reluctance.

In addition to the barriers above, Harris (2004) comments that distributed leadership may lead to "estrangement among teachers" (p. 21). Within institutions, distributed leadership may create a lack of security, predictability and stability among members (Harris, 2013). It is not hard to imagine that the ambiguous border between responsibilities and powers may also cause conflictions and tensions of relationship. Teachers may be hostile to distributed leadership because of insecurity and over-cautiousness (Harris, 2004). The questionnaire findings suggest that, with the exception of the respondents in Department MP, the majority of the respondents overall did not think that distributing leadership might cause strained relationships. However, their concerns care more fully reflected in the interview transcriptions:

> *"There may be conflicts between the regulations that are defined by leaders and opposite opinions pointed out by the informal leaders. The arguments will cause low efficiency"* (Staff 5, Department CE).

> *"People debate the issues because they are thinking about different benefits. It will cause low efficiency; the resources will be wasted and the relationship will be influenced. Therefore, there should always be formal leaders to ultimately centralise"* (Staff 6, Department MP).

Gosling (2009) adds that other disadvantages of distributed leadership include stress for staff, procrastination in decision-making, and role confusion, which can also be found in the transcript extracts above. The problems mentioned by both Gosling and reflected in the interview data led the researcher to address the important role of formal leaders in distributed leadership to avoid these negative

sides. In line with the statement of Woods et al. (2009), distributed leadership is considered as a structure, while at the same time, it is the formal leaders rather than other staff members who are considered as the *agency* that operates an organisation. Leaders are still responsible for cultivating culture and make the ultimate decisions, regardless of the extent of leadership distribution. Besides, considering that the lack of reward for informal leaders can cause both conflicts and a decrease in initiative on the part of staff, leaders within the four departments are recommended to allocate a certain amount of money into the annual finance budget for rewarding their informal leaders.

The questionnaire findings also suggest that most of the respondents in the four departments considered the centralised government as one of the barriers to distributed leadership. This is consistent with the argument of Harris (2004) who wrote that the top-down leadership system can be one of the barriers that prevents teachers in organisations from taking on leadership responsibilities and achieving autonomy. NCSL (2004) also mentions the organisational structure as one of the factors that inhibits the implementation and success of distributed leadership. Interviews followed up on the questionnaire findings to further examine the influence of the top-down leadership system in the four departments. Firstly, staff members were asked whether they think leadership in their department is autocratic. Almost all of them confirmed that leadership is not autocratic:

> *"I do not think so. Everyone is friendly; we communicate with each other in a kind and polite way. In our department, there is no dictator"* (Staff 4, Department EM).

Harris (2004) wrote that "clearly organisations as traditional hierarchies, with the demarcations of position and pay-scale, are not going to be instantly responsive to a more fluid and distributed approach to leadership" (p. 20). This assumes that it may take much longer time to achieve distributed leadership within a centralised and hierarchical leadership system, even if leadership is not seen as being autocratic. Considering this, staff members were then asked whether they

think it is difficult to change the traditional leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model. The deep influence of the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down system was evident:

> *"It will be hard to change because we have so many people in the department who [would make it] much easier to cause anarchy. Therefore, we will always need leaders and a centralised system. The important thing is the extent of autonomy and centralisation"* (Staff 3, Department CE).

> *"The influence of the official standard thought in the traditional culture has existed for so long and will take several decades to be lessened"* (Staff 1, Department MP).

The transcripts imply that the size of the organisation can also become one of the barriers. The deep influence of traditional cultural elements such as the Official Standard thought the adoring of authority were addressed here again.

5.7. How leadership Skills are Developed

Harris (2014) points out that it is important to harness the leadership capacities and professional skills of both leaders and other staff members. Spillane (2012) mentions that for doing so, leaders should identify "teachers with leadership potential and provide them with professional development opportunities to hone their skills, scaffolding their transition into leadership positions" (p. 44). This statement is consistent with the questionnaire findings; most of the questionnaire respondents in the four departments thought that for developing leadership skills in staff, leaders should identify those with leadership potential or ability. As mentioned earlier, the perspective of Leader 1 in Department FL can be a good example as a formal leader in this context:

> *"Sometimes I see the leading ability of some staff; I will then try to discover their potential through allocating responsibilities to them. If I find him/her good at teaching/researching/leading, I will further cultivate him/her*

consciously" (Leader 1, Department FL).

Likewise, the questionnaire results also suggest that staff should be more involved in decision-making to develop leadership skills. As Harris (2013) argues, leadership ability can be maximised by "broad-based leadership" (p. 153), achieved through taking on decision-making responsibility, a high degree of autonomy, and involvement. Both questionnaires and interview responses have demonstrated that the four departments have provided a variety of channels for staff members to get involved in decision-making process, which is beneficial for the staff members to improve their leadership skills.

In line with the opinion of Harris, most of the questionnaire respondents in Department MP thought that formal leadership training could be provided to develop leadership abilities. This was also referenced by some of the interviewees in other three departments. The transcripts suggest that some of the staff members have recognised that leadership skills are a comprehensive knowledge which can also help them to improve their teaching skills. This is consistent with the argument of Edwards (2014) who wrote that leadership training is beneficial not only for leadership improvement but also for improvements in teaching and learning.

However, the interview results reveal that although some of the leaders and staff have recognised the importance of developing leadership skills for all the staff members, many of them still think leadership trainings for staff members is unnecessary. The extracts indicate a low consciousness of improving all staff members' leading abilities on the part of some of the leaders and staff members within the four departments. The only descriptions that may be relevant to leadership training are from Department FL; visiting Western universities is considered a way of improving their leadership skills. Leader 1 in Department FL commented that "the department sent 10 visiting scholars abroad each year"; staff 2 in Department FL added that, "In the workshop, colleagues who went abroad shared their life experiences and the advanced leadership concepts of Western countries". However, as one of the transcripts above (Leader 1 in

Department CE) suggests, the university provides training but only for leaders rather than for all the staff members. According to the leaders, training is provided for all the formal leaders each year through workshops and visiting other universities, while any strategy to improve leadership skills for the staff was not mentioned. There is no leadership training provided for staff members and this situation was further verified by other interviewees.

Interviewees were further asked what might help the staff members to improve leadership skills. Staff members suggested that there should be more practical opportunities for them; this can also be reflected from the questionnaire results. According to the questionnaire findings, the majority of the respondents in Departments EM and FL thought that leaders should create more leadership positions. As Hopkins and Jackson (2002 cited in Harris, 2004, p. 15) wrote, "formal leaders in schools need to orchestrate and nurture the space for distributed leadership to occur and to create the 'shelter conditions' for the leadership of collaborative learning". Besides, other main strategies that were mentioned by the interviewees include workshops, online courses, and university visits.

5.8. The Cultural Dimensions which exist in relation to the Distribution of Leadership

Feng (2012) wrote that the differences in sociocultural contexts may lead to different kinds of distributed leadership. Thus it is important to address the cultural dimensions that exist in relation to distributed leadership in this context. According to the questionnaire findings, apart from the statement about adoring authority that came up in Department MP, the listed cultural dimensions in the questionnaires are all recognised as functioning in relation to distributed leadership, having been ticked by most of the respondents in the four departments. Amongst the descriptions, the description of collectivism was the most selected cultural dimension thought to be in play in relation to the distribution of leadership, followed by the socialist elements and patriarchy. Adoring authority was seen as the cultural dimension least evident in relation to

the distribution of leadership, followed by the worshipping of tradition and enterprise.

'Traditional Chinese culture' in this context mainly refers to the philosophy of Confucianism. As Pye (1984 cited in Fan, 2000, p. 6) wrote, "Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential thought, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behaviour". The Chinese tradition has been considered as having a great impact on the characteristics and developmental processes of Chinese education (Wang and Mao, 1996). Bush and Haiyan (2000) claim that the central part of worshipping the tradition is "an emphasis on traditions and the linked patriarchal clan system" (p. 59); this tendency is reflected in the interview data, wherein the respondents pointed out the deep influence of the traditional Chinese culture in the departments and in this district. It is noted that, although the questionnaire findings show that worshiping the tradition was not seen as a cultural dimension which factors highly in relation to distributed leadership, the interview transcripts do indicate that leadership in the four departments is still influenced by the traditional Chinese culture. The transcripts here also indicate that this situation may vary between the districts and universities; the extent of worshiping the tradition may be lessened in other Chinese contexts. This corresponds with the argument of Bush et al. (1998, p. 137), "all theories and interpretations of practice must be 'grounded' in the specific context".

One of the transcripts above (Leader 2 in Department FL) also shows the influence of the official standard thought, which is linked with the idea of adoring authority. According to Du (2014), the official standard thought refers to the admiration of officials; being an official is considered as a matter of the utmost importance. The researcher found that during the interviews, the positions of leaders are frequently linked with the words such as 'power' and 'authority', rather than 'reputation' or 'knowledge'. The idea of adoring authority is obvious; for example, Leader 3 in Department MP explained that the reason for adoring authority in the departments is due to the possibility of promotion:

"Why does everyone want to become a leader? The biggest thing of working in the university is to get promoted; staff members would like to work for promotion even if you do not give them extra bonus for it. They definitely adore the authority as 'leaders' decide if they can be promoted… But now the committees are regulated to have a proportion of professors".

Besides, Leader 3 in Department FL stated that "the Confucian idea prefers a powerful government" while Staff 5 in Department CE said that "you will be respected when your friends know that you became a leader". Leader 2 in Department EM commented that "everyone will fear to speak out the opposite opinions and will keep silent if the leaders think something is right". This is supported by Staff 6 in the Department EM, who mentioned that "it is much easier to manage and lead staff members here since people prefer to follow the leaders". As such, the researcher found that the ability of critical thinking and the sense of participation amongst staff members needs to be cultivated. This also extends to the students; Leader 1 in Department MP added that "students always think teachers are right; they barely disagree with their teachers".

In spite of all this, the influence of the traditional Chinese culture has decreased as the years have gone by. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire findings show that adoring authority is considered the least influential cultural dimension in the distribution of leadership. All the interviews show similar results. The interviewees verified this tendency by giving their different interpretations of authority. The transcript extracts show that with the development of economy, science and technology, the values of individuals have started to shift from adoring power and authority to knowledge and wealth. Young staff members, who are influenced by both Chinese traditions and Western culture, are more likely to display this tendency.

Adoring authority is associated with the patriarchal culture. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 60) argue, "the respect for authority in China 'has deep connections with the rigid social stratification of the clan system in Chinese feudal society'.' This is closely linked with the concept of 'filial piety', 'which requires absolute

obedience and complete devotion to parents.'" In line with Bush and Haiyan, the deep influence of the patriarchy is reflected in the questionnaire findings; it shows that patriarchy ranks as the third cultural dimension that has influence on the distribution of leadership. Likewise, interviewees also claimed the influence of patriarchy in the departments:

> *"For our daily affairs, we usually ask the older staff members to guide the younger teachers; the young teachers can learn from their colleagues' experiences"* (Leader 1, Department CE).

> *"According to the Chinese tradition, seniority is quite important; compared with young teachers, old teachers are regarded as having more experiences and skills"* (Staff 3, Department EM).

The five codes of human relations and five principles (Wu Lun) defined by Confucius include sovereign and subject/master and follower; father and son; husband and wife; elder and younger brothers; and friend and friend (five human relations); and loyalty and duty; love and obedience; obligation and submission; seniority and modelling subject; and trust (five principles) (Fan, 2000). The evidence of the interview transcripts is consistent with the idea of Wu Lun and suggest that in organisations, the youngest and the newest who are seen as having fewer skills and experiences should respect and obey the oldest, regardless of their actual potential. However, the quote from Leader 3 in Department FL implies that departmental development is in a transitional period wherein it is influenced by both the traditional culture and Western values. As Leader 3 pointed out, "the old way of mentoring is going to be abandoned, as nowadays the young teachers are more likely to have higher degree than the old teachers; some of them may even graduate from other countries".

Although the quotations above imply that the influence of traditional cultural elements such as adoring authority and patriarchy have been lessened, the existence of these cultural dimensions may still hinder the distribution of leadership in the four departments to some extent. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p.

60) described:

> China might be regarded as the archetypal high power-distance society although there are now suggestions of a modest shift from this traditional position. Wang and Mao regard respect for elders as 'a consistent virtue of the Chinese notion' but add that complete submission is unfavourable to the spirit of democracy.

This tendency can also be reflected from the female position in Chinese societies and Higher Education. *Wu Lun* refers to the notion that there should be obligation and submission in the relationship of husband and wife. The influence of patriarchy causes the low position of females in Chinese society. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 65) wrote, "China is by no means alone in experiencing under-representation of women in management positions, within and outside education, but it may be slower than most to acknowledge the issue and to seek remedies." This tendency is revealed in Department FL:

> *"We have many female teachers in our department; they need to consider their family and children and therefore have less time and energy to participate in leadership activities"* (Staff 3, Department FL).

> *"It is hard to share leadership responsibilities in the Department of Foreign Languages as there is a high proportion of female teachers. Female teachers seem to have a lower consciousness of leadership than male teachers"* (Staff 6, Department FL).

The transcripts show that female teachers themselves give up their chances to take part in leadership activities, even though the position and treatment of Chinese women have been greatly improved since the establishment of PRC. The issue of female involvement in leadership addressed the importance of female teachers' sense of participation; female staff members in these departments should change the situation by taking advantage of the popularity of distributed leadership to take on more leadership responsibilities. As ESHA (2013) argues,

female respondents have a positive correlation with distributed leadership, the participation of female teachers in the departments may be helpful to achieve higher extents of distributed leadership.

Confucianism is about the moral and behavioural doctrine regarding ethics, virtuous behaviour, social structures and human relationship, emphasising the importance of moral and ethical self-cultivation in Chinese tradition (Fan, 2000). The importance of moral and ethical self-cultivation is addressed within Confucianism. As Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 62) wrote:

> The traditional Chinese culture emphasizes a person's self-cultivation for ethical and moral perfection. The Confucian scholars advocate modesty and encourage friendly co-operation, giving priority to people's relationships. The purpose of education is to shape every individual into a harmonious member of the society.

As mentioned earlier, most of the questionnaire respondents in the four departments recognised the statement of moral and ethical self-cultivation as functioning in relation to distributed leadership; this corresponds with the argument of Bush and Haiyan. The significance of moral and ethical self-cultivation was also addressed during the interviews; for example, Leader 1 in Department FL claimed:

> *"We respect people who have both high morality and academic authority. The authority plus a rude, pretentious and arrogant character will be despised; the respect of it is fake and temporary"*.

As one of the moral doctrines in Confucianism, the doctrine of the mean thought (Zhongyong) was also frequently mentioned by the interviewees, suggesting its deep influence on leadership in the research context. In Mandarin, Zhong means either one way or another whereas Yong means mediocrity. Zhongyong is considered as a self-cultivation approach to perfect individuals by maintaining harmony and balance from keeping both the inner mind and outside world in a

state of everlasting equilibrium. According to the interviewees, its outcomes include being gentle and avoiding conflicts (for example, do not break the peace and harmony; avoiding sharp conflicts; do not ask the questions when others have no willingness to answers). Its virtues were both justified and denied by interviewees. The transcripts suggest that the existence of the doctrine of mean thought can help to bring the harmony and milk of human kindness which the regulations and rules lack. As such, this doctrine may be beneficial for the distribution of leadership. However, it may also cause certain problems such as shyness, low-efficiency in communication, and superficial harmony. Meanwhile, the extract quoted above also reveals that members in the departments are trying to keep in harmony with one another. This is consistent with the arguments of Satow and Wang (1994) and Chang Li et al. (2009), who argue that paying attention to harmonious relationships with individuals is crucial for achieving both personal and business success in Chinese organisations.

This is associated with another cultural value, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationship), in Chinese societies. As Chen (1997, cited in Tjeldvoll, 2011, p. 226) explains, "Confucianism sees interpersonal relationships as long-term and mutually binding. This is regarded as more important than actual business activities." Thus, aiming to achieve a harmonious and intimate working environment where sorrows and happiness can be shared, Chinese organisations' members may pay much more attention to maintaining the quality of relationship with other staff members (Lin and Clair, 2007). In line with the literature, both leaders and staff members confirmed the importance of interpersonal relationship:

> *"Things are bound with emotions and relationships in our culture; it will be hard to implement regulations or carry out things as sometimes people cannot be rational. For example, when there are issues coming out, the first thing that I need to think about is whom; the relationship between me and this person has an impact on how I should deal with the issues"* (Leader 3, Department FL).

Lin and Clair (2007) argue that people in the West are more likely to be

outcome-oriented, whereas Chinese people are more likely to be process-oriented. This means that in Chinese society, it is more common to pay attention to the atmosphere of the conversation and an approachable means of conducting communication between people, rather than focusing on achieving the result. This is consistent with Li et al. (2009, p. 476) who wrote, "the tradition of using *guanxi* to achieve personal or business goals is still evident in every aspect of society", the selected interview transcript verifies this argument and show that the importance of personal relationships in the four departments helps to bring harmonious relationships between organisational members, and helps the allocation of responsibilities to become more flexible. This provides an accommodating environment for the distribution of leadership. However, it is noted that the power of regulations may be invalid or lessened because of the flexibility of interpersonal relationships.

Stressing collectivism is also one of the traditional Chinese cultural dimensions that are addressed as relating to leadership in Chinese education by Bush and Haiyan (2000). Consistent with Bush and Haiyan, the questionnaire findings show that the description of collectivism is regarded as the cultural dimension that is most evident in relation to the distribution of leadership in the four departments. The deep influence of collectivism was also clearly presented during the interviews. As mentioned earlier, the interview transcripts indicate a high extent of responsibility and accountability, especially in Department CE when the respondents were asked to describe their responsibilities (see 5.3.). For example, Staff 3 said that "I feel ashamed if our department does not have a good development", whereas Staff 2 mentioned that "I paid both time and energy on our department development with no benefits but saw it as my own duties". Leader 1 also argued that "sometimes I did something for other members and our department". Collectivism was mentioned as the reason for the statements above. Besides this, the deep influence of collectivism was also expressed by interviewees in other ways; the transcripts imply that the value of collectivism is also one of the reasons for adoring authority and patriarchy, since organisational (and family) members are more likely to place their individual benefits behind the collective benefits, whereas the centralised system and patriarchy address the

importance of obedience, which is similar to self-sacrifice and collectivism. These cultural dimensions are actually interrelated with each other.

A teaching and researching group (jiaoyanzu) was also mentioned by Staff members 2 and 3 in Department FL (the last two transcripts above). In line with these extracts, Bush and Haiyan (2000) claim that within educational organisations in China, the value of collectivism is manifested through the establishment of *Jiaoyanzu* (a group of teachers working together on the same subjects). Within *jiaoyanzu*, teachers work collegially to discuss questions and materials, observe demonstration lessons, and give feedback (Bush et al., 1998). The interviews further reveal that, although its application has been gradually impaired since the geographical dispersion of teachers, teaching and researching groups are seen as a helpful approach for improving teaching quality. For example, Leader 2 in Department CE claimed that "we design our own slides based upon a sharing one. It is much easier", whereas Leader 1 in Department MP mentioned that "we gather around regularly to discuss difficult mathematic problems". In line with the descriptions of interviewees, jiaoyanzu is also considered as a preferred model in Western culture (Bush, 2006, Bush and Haiyan, 2000). Bush and Haiyan (2000, p. 60) highlight its positive function:

> The collective authority of the teachers through the 'jiaoyanzu' provides a countervailing influence to the power of the principal. The respect for formal authority is tempered by acknowledgement of the need to work collaboratively with teachers.

However, interviewees stated that the value of collectivism has been lessened due to the flexibility of working in universities and the influence of the Western culture. It is noted that leaders and some of the staff members are still stressing collectivism while a few staff members have considered it as old-fashioned. As such, during the interviews, the respondents were asked whether they think collectivism is positive or negative for the distribution of leadership. The results show that although collectivism may be seen as a negative value by some of the respondents, interviewees confirmed that the idea of collectivism is beneficial for

the distribution of leadership and for organisational development.

The Chinese Culture Collection (1987) conducted a survey with Chinese social scientists and summarised seventy-one traditional Chinese values as Chinese Culture Values (CCVs). According to Fan (2000, p. 8), these include: "veneration for the old"; "deference to authority"; "conformity/ group orientation"; "avoiding confrontation"; "*guanxi* (personal connection or networking)"; "being gentlemanly anytime", etc. Considering these within the context of this study, it is clear that although respondents thought that worshiping the tradition has been lessened, all of the cultural dimensions argued above (adoring authority, patriarchy, moral and ethical self-cultivation, the doctrine of the mean, interpersonal relationship and collectivism) are associated with the traditional Chinese culture which is made up of these values. It reveals that the distribution of leadership in Chinese Higher Education is deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese culture; this influence may be lessened but will not be erased completely.

The ideology of collectivism has also been lessened by the influence of enterprise culture. As Staff 2 in the Department MP said, people have learnt individualism from the outside world and have become more materialistic since the establishment of the socialist market economy. According to Bush and Haiyan (2000), market socialism is an excellent combination of enterprise and communism and helps maintain the balance between collectivist and individual values. This argument was further justified by Staff 6 in Department EM:

> *"The reform and opening up enables the companies and institutions to pay more attention to the 'people' since the knowledge and abilities of individuals become more important for the institutions' development. As such, the initiative of staff members becomes very important"* (Staff 6, Department EM).

As Min (2004, p. 66-65) writes:

> In the newly developed market economy in China, it is market supply and

> demand rather than government planning that plays the basic role in resource allocation and utilization. The labour market plays the key role in determining human resources development and allocation.

In line with the description of Min, the transcription suggests that although people are seen as being more selfish than before, the labour market of the socialist market economy enables the staff members to think about themselves more rather than only making sacrifices for the institutions. Likewise, the organisations are pushed to be more considerate and less hierarchical in order to keep staff members. This environment is good for promoting the distribution of leadership. This tendency is also reflected in the argument of Williams, Liu and Shi (1997, p. 152):

> The belief of the collective will of people (represented by the State) having the supreme power and absolute authority, started to evolve into a belief that individuals should have the right to achieve their personal goals and have the opportunities to excel in their respective professions.

Another advantage of the socialist market economy is that it helps to decrease the official standard thought; as Leader 3 in Department MP mentioned, “with the development of the economy, being an official is still tough while citizens have become rich and are able to enjoy life. Thoughts have been changed”.

Besides traditional Chinese culture, socialist culture is considered as the second main aspect of Chinese cultural dimensions that relates to educational leadership in China (Bush and Haiyan, 2000). In line with the statement of Bush and Haiyan, the questionnaire findings reveal that the description of the social element is seen as the second most prevalent cultural dimension that is in relation to the distribution of leadership in the four departments. According to Du (2014), the current leadership system in Chinese Higher Education is called the Principal Responsibility System under the Leadership of the Party Committee, aiming to address the leadership position of the Party Committee and to ensure that university leadership complies with the guidance of the Chinese government.

Interviews were carried out to further examine the practical influence of the Party Committee in the four departments. According to the interviewees, the Party Committee plays different roles at university and departmental levels. The Communist Party Secretary plays an important role at the university level, as the Principal of this university explained:

> *"The role of the Communist Party Secretary is very important in the Chinese universities as they provide guidance from the perspectives of both politics and university development. They help the university to be united"* (Principal).

This tendency is correspondent with Du (2014) who explains that under the supervision of the Party Committee, the university principals have the independence to manage universities in terms of teaching and learning, researching and administrative work.

At the departmental level, the interviews suggest that the Department Heads are mainly responsible for the overall development of the institution, whereas the responsibilities of Party Branch Secretaries are mainly to help the Department Heads and deal with the work of Party building of both students and department members. This is consistent with the argument of Si (1993) who states that the function of the General Party Branch is to provide political education to students and faculties and simultaneously ensure that educational leadership and management in China politically follows the Party's principles and guidance. As such, when being asked about the influence of the socialist culture in the four departments, the respondents claimed that the socialist elements do have a great political impact on the distribution of leadership in the departments, but that their practical influence on academic development is little.

As Du (2014) wrote, there are mainly three leadership powers in Chinese universities: the power of decision-making, administrative power and academic power. As mentioned earlier, the power of decision-making in Chinese universities may be influenced by the political power; the imbalance of the administrative and academic power was also pointed out by interviewees.

According to the interviewees, academic power should be higher than the administrative power in universities; however, the situation in the research context is the other way around. As an additional and unanticipated topic arising from the interview process, de-administration was mentioned as a proposed strategy to weaken administrative power and improve academic power. All the interviewees agreed with this proposal, but some of them doubted its practical application. The transcripts show that de-administration may erase the administrative titles of the university and departmental leaders recorded in the local government; this means that the administrative power in the universities will be weakened. Meanwhile, it presumes that the academic power may become stronger. As such, the status of professors and teachers in Chinese universities may be raised. This proposal promises to help achieve balance between three leadership powers in Chinese universities, and was fully supported by all the interviewees. However, as the interviewees mentioned, de-administration aims to erase the official influence in the centralised and hierarchical system. Its practical application is worth keeping an eye on.

Day et al. (2009) have suggested that distributed leadership even exists in the most tightly structured and hierarchically configured institution. As mentioned earlier, the distribution of leadership in the four departments is deeply influenced by the hierarchical system. Despite this, the interviewees claimed that they are acknowledged by the hierarchical system and regard it as a highly efficient organisational structure. This study has revealed that within the hierarchical structure, there are varying extents of distributed leadership present in the four departments. This is corresponds with Woods and Roberts (2016, p. 140) who wrote, “distributed leadership is typically combined with hierarchically distributed leadership authority, though the steepness of hierarchy and the extent of centralized leadership power vary between organizational settings”. This study also suggests that distributed leadership can co-exist with hierarchy; they are not at odds with one other. Within the Asian hierarchical context, distributed leadership and hierarchical structure can be complementary. As Woods and Woods (2013) state, hierarchy may be beneficial for distributed leadership practice as it can be seen as a way of balancing democratic and hierarchical

values.

5.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of this research and analyzed them comparatively with the literature in this field. It answered the research questions and discussed distributed leadership within four case departments in a Chinese University by considering seven aspects including the conceptual recognition of distributed leadership; the perception of the extent of distributed leadership; the mechanisms of distributed leadership; the beneficial effects of distributed leadership; the disadvantages of and barriers to distributed leadership; how leadership skills are developed; and the cultural dimensions related to the distribution of leadership.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

This chapter summarises the main findings of this study by answering the seven research questions. It then explains the contribution to the field by this study and its and discusses its implication for future research.

6.1. Summary of the Findings

The research aim of this study was to identify the extent to which leadership is distributed at the departmental level in a Chinese university, and the factors which influence leadership distribution in the Chinese context through the perceptions of Chinese heads and other members of their departments. The seven research questions and a summary of the findings are as follows:

In this Chinese University (Q):

1. To what extent is the concept of distributed leadership recognized?

The study shows that although the term, 'distributed leadership', may have not been fully recognised by all the respondents, most of them had a good understanding of the concept of this leadership model. Both leaders and staff members understood that leadership responsibilities are shared within their departments. Leaders are seen as coordinators who encourage staff members to display their potential abilities and skills to contribute toward organisational development, while staff members are encouraged to participate in leadership activities. The importance of interaction was addressed by the respondents; this resonates with the core element of distributed leadership summarised by Harris (2013, p. 12), distributed leadership "focuses upon the *interactions*, rather than the actions, of those in *formal and informal* leadership roles". Likewise, as Harris and Lambert (2003) point out *t*he *broad-based involvement* which involves many people is emphasized in the distribution of leadership in practice, within the four departments, it was mentioned that the departments have provided many opportunities and channels for the staff members to participate in leadership

responsibilities and in the decision-making process, showing the *broad-based involvement* emphasised in discussions of leadership practice. Both the questionnaire findings and the arguments in the course of interviews are congruent with the main concepts of distributed leadership. This study also reveals that distributed leadership has existed within all the four departments in some way, since the departmental situations within the organisations are in alignment with the conceptual descriptions of distributed leadership.

2. To what extent is leadership distributed in practice?

This research question was examined by using seven dimensions of ESHA's (2013) model from the distributed perspective: organisational structure, strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision-making, responsibility and accountability, and initiative. The study suggests that an environment of distributed leadership has been established. Leadership is distributed to some extent within the four case departments, although the extents vary within each department. In the four case departments, the extent of distributed leadership ranking from higher to lower are Departments MP, FL, CE and EM respectively. Departments MP and FL are more likely to have a higher extent degree of distributed leadership in place than Departments CE and EM; within Department MP and FL, there are high extents of distributed leadership occurring within the dimensions of strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision-making, and responsibility and accountability, as these dimensions were marked positively in the questionnaire by all the respondents.

The official organisational structures of the four case departments are hierarchical and well-defined, and it is acknowledged that although distributed leadership has existed within the departments and coexists with the hierarchical structure, the hierarchical structure is seen as one of the potential barriers that hinders the practice of distributed leadership in certain degree. For example, Staff 3 in the Department MP mentioned that they "do not give many negative comments since the proposal are from the leaders". This tendency is more

evident within Department EM; although the organisational structure of the Department provides the channels for staff members to participate in the decision-making process, its practical application is hindered by the style and power of formal leaders. The formal leaders who are in lower positions could still feel the influence of the power of those leaders who are in the higher positions, and the mechanism of decision-making can be manipulated and utilised flexibly by leaders. That notwithstanding, this does not mean that distributed leadership necessarily conflicts with the hierarchical context. Aside from the issue within Department EM, there are a variety of channels for staff members to participate in leadership activities and decision-making processes if they want to do so. These include weekly meetings within the departments, the faculty congress meetings, voting system, and the establishment of information platforms etc.

A hierarchical institutional leadership structure is still accepted by leaders and staff members as a significant and efficient leadership approach which is appropriate to Chinese universities due to their very large sizes. However, this study has shown that it is quite possible for leadership to be distributed within departments which are located in organisations where the central leadership structure is hierarchical. Thus, it is possible to consider distributed leadership as a balance between hierarchy and anarchism which resonates with Tian et al. (2016) and Woods and Gronn (2009) who pointed that distributed leadership is a hybrid of hierarchical and heterarchical leadership approaches. It may be the case that as, or indeed, if distributed leadership continues to flourish in Chinese universities, it might also have a diluting effect on the hierarchical nature of institutional leadership.

Both leaders and staff members within the four case departments have common values and shared vision. According to the respondents, the main aim of the departments is to provide a high quality of teaching and to achieve more in research; as such, the main responsibilities of staff members are teaching and researching. However, the extents of emphasis on teaching and researching respectively vary within different departments. For example, teaching is seen as

more important than doing research within Departments MP and FL since English, Maths, and Physics are regarded as public core modules in Chinese universities. This study reveals that one of the reasons why Department CE has become the leading department of this university is due to the high importance it places on research - the Department is more likely to be research oriented, which is in line with the orientation of the Chinese national policy in Higher Education.

The relationships between leaders and staff members are harmonious; leaders are claimed as friends and research partners by staff members. There are high extents of cooperation and collaboration within the four departments. As Spillane (2012) conceptualises, collaborative distribution refers to leadership practice that has multiple leaders working together in the same routine, time and place, whereas coordinated distribution refers to leadership practice that has multiple leadership activities and routines with a particular order and sequence. The main types of co-performance approaches in these departments are collaborative distribution and coordinated distribution. However, it is acknowledged that there are limited opportunities for the colleagues to meet due to the geographical dispersion and the autonomous nature of roles in Higher Education.

There are high extents of responsibility and accountability within the four departments. Some staff members claimed that they would like to take on responsibilities without the expectation of receiving additional benefit, the reason for which may be the influence of Chinese collectivism. The willingness to take on leadership responsibilities is also high in the questionnaire findings, while the interview findings regarding initiative may vary with the departments. Staff members are more likely to feel eager to take on leadership responsibilities than they are able to actually do so, due to the influence of the Chinese culture and the imbalance between the large population base of the organisations and limited opportunities.

3. By what mechanisms are leadership distributed?

This research question is examined by using the six mechanisms of NCSL's

(2004) model for distributed leadership: formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, strategic distribution, incremental distribution, opportunistic distribution and cultural distribution. The mechanism of distributed leadership within the four case departments is mainly through designated jobs and role descriptions, which is theoretically defined as formal distribution by NCSL (2004). The roles, positions and responsibilities have been defined clearly both at departmental and university level. Responsibility allocation, and the procedure of selecting individuals have become systematic, and the boundaries of responsibilities are obvious. This leadership practice is supported and seen as a highly efficient leadership approach by the respondents.

As MacBeath (2009) highlights, leadership within an organisation does not 'fit neatly into' a certain mechanism. As well as formal distribution, pragmatic distribution is also discovered within Department MP since the leaders may directly allocate responsibilities to certain staff members in the case of an urgent or exceptional situation. The main methods leaders employ in choosing the '*right'* person(s) to take on leadership responsibilities are based on the staff members' educational background, abilities, their willingness and initiative, and the closeness of the relationship. Young/junior staff members are also more likely to be allocated responsibilities, although they may have no willingness to take them on. This situation occurs not only within Department MP but also within the other three case departments, resonating with the argument of Hatcher (2005) who explains that distributed leadership may be used as a political mechanism to manipulate staff into taking on extra workload. In addition, incremental distribution can also be seen in Department FL as leaders allocate responsibilities to those staff members who present potential capacity and ability. Formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, and incremental distribution can all be categorised as top-down leadership approaches, revealing that the phases of distributed leadership with the four case departments are still developing. Leaders are still playing the important role of establishing leadership; initiative is more likely to be discovered coming from the top down than the bottom up. It is acknowledged that, the departments still need time to cultivate a culture which enables the staff members to display their potentialities for leadership from the

bottom.

4. What are the beneficial effects of distributed leadership?

In line with the literature, this study suggests that distributed leadership is advantageous for organisational development. For example, staff members complained that some of the current policies in place within the departments are claimed as unreasonable as staff members are not part of the policy making group. Meanwhile, leaders also complained that the hardship and difficulties of being in a leadership position are not understood by the staff members. There seems to be misunderstanding between leaders and staff members, which may be reduced by the distribution of leadership. In addition, distributed leadership can also help to improve staff members' self-efficacy. Although the positive correlation between distributed leadership and student performance was doubted by the scholars in the earlier literature and research, this study shows that distributed leadership is beneficial for improving student performance, although the influence may be indirect and takes a long time to become visible. It is in line with Harris (2013, p. 110) who wrote that "distributed leadership has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning which have in turn been converted into positive student learning outcome".

5. What are the disadvantages of and barriers to distributed leadership?

Financial budget is not one of the barriers to distributed leadership within the four case departments, as there is no monetary reward provided for informal leadership and therefore there will no extra cost. Nevertheless, one of the barriers to distributed leadership is that staff members may have a low level of willingness to take on leadership responsibilities. The reasons discovered include age (the perception that they are too old to take on leadership), the pressure associated with leadership, and the existing burden of their workloads. As such, formal leadership should employ strategies to encourage and motivate informal leaders. For example, financial incentives for taking on extra work and leadership responsibilities may be a helpful and efficient approach within the

four case departments. Meanwhile, formal leaders can also become one of the barriers to distributed leadership; it was found that formal leadership within Department MP are found to feel threatened during the implementation of leadership distribution.

Respondents hold different views on whether or not taking on leadership responsibilities would affect their ability as a teacher or not; the answer depends on the individual's personal situation such as age, workload, time management ability etc. However, this study reveals that taking on leadership responsibilities may give a staff member responsibility but no power, since the border between the responsibility that has been given and the power that should go with it in an informal context is ambiguous and blurred. This situation is consistent with Ritchie and Woods (2007) who explain that, distributed leadership may increase the responsibilities and burdens of teachers, but at the same time the power is not shared with those informal leaders. This may in turn cause conflict and estranged relationships within the departments.

The centralised system is also regarded as one of the obstacles to the distribution of leadership; it may take much longer to achieve distributed leadership within a centralised and hierarchical leadership system. This study shows that some of the cultural elements, such as the doctrine of the mean thought, the complexity of interpersonal relationship and modesty, can also become barriers to distributed leadership. Other elements that are also argued as potentially affecting distributed leadership in this study include the size of the organisation, organisational structure, and the defined assessment system.

6. How are leadership skills developed?

Most of the respondents within the four departments have realised the important role of leaders in improving leadership skills in staff; leaders should have both the consciousness and ability to identify those staff members who have potential leadership skills and abilities. Likewise, staff members should also take the initiative to participate in leadership activities and decision-making processes.

This study shows that the four departments provide a range of opportunities and channels for staff members to engage in decision-making, which is advantageous for improving their leadership skills.

Leadership training is also a good way of improving leadership skills for all the staff members (Edwards, 2014). Corresponding with Edwards, some of the respondents - especially most of the formal leaders - have realised that it is necessary to improve leadership abilities, since leadership skills are connected with teaching and learning. Some of the respondents still think it is unnecessary to provide trainings for staff members, showing a low consciousness of the need to improve all staff members' leadership abilities. Within the four departments, leadership trainings including workshops and university visits are currently only provided to the formal leaders rather than being available to all the staff members. The only activity that may be relevant to leadership training for staff members is provided in Department FL; 10 visiting scholars who are sent abroad each year may share their experiences and the leadership concepts that they learn. Respondents suggest that more opportunities (i.e. more leadership positions) should be provided for staff members to gain practical experience. Online courses are also seen as a good method due to their flexibility.

7. What are the cultural aspects/dimensions in relation to the distribution of leadership in this Chinese University?

All the listed cultural dimensions in the questionnaires are recognised as functioning in relation to distributed leadership in these departments, although their levels of influence vary. According to the questionnaire findings, the top three dimensions are collectivism, socialist elements, and patriarchy respectively, whereas adoring authority is considered as the cultural dimension least evident in relation to the distribution of leadership, followed by the worshipping of tradition, and enterprise. The interview results reveal that leadership within the four case departments is deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, although the worshiping of tradition may be lessened in other Chinese contexts. As the birthplace of Confucianism, this district is perhaps more heavily influenced by

the official standard thought; the situation of adoring authority is still obvious. However, this study shows that these influences have been decreased with the development of the economy, science and technology. Adoring authority is gradually replaced by adoring knowledge and wealth; this tendency is more likely to be discovered within the younger generation who are influenced by both traditional Chinese culture and Western cultures due to the Chinese reform and the opening-up policy.

The four case departments are also in a transitional period wherein their development is influenced by both domestic and foreign cultures. For example, due to the influence of patriarchy, old teachers are considered as having more seniority and experiences than young teachers. The old values have been changed since there are increasing numbers of young teachers who are well educated with degrees or higher degrees from Western countries. Another issue associated with patriarchy is that female staff members within the four departments are more likely to give up their opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities, although ESHA (2013) found a positive correlation between female members and distributed leadership. As such, female staff members should take advantage of the popularity of distributed leadership to increase their participation and get involved in more leadership activities.

Moral and ethical self-cultivation is still addressed by the respondents due to the deep influence of Confucian culture, and particularly the doctrine of the mean thought (Zhongyong). Respondents within the four departments prefer to be gentle and avoid conflicts; they are shy of speaking out either in relation to their demands or their willingness to take on tasks. This is associated with another aspect of Chinese culture, the importance of interpersonal relationships; the staff members and leaders pay close attention to maintaining a harmonious environment and good relationships between people. A harmonious environment is helpful to improve distributed leadership; however, the power of regulation would be reduced negatively because there is flexibility in the way interpersonal relationships are conducted.

Collectivism is seen as very important within Chinese organisations, considered a positive value both for the organisation's development and for the distribution of leadership. The ideology of collectivism can be reflected in the establishment of the teaching and researching groups (jiaoyanzu), although the geographical dispersion of staff has impaired its practical application. As Bush and Haiyan (2000) argue, "the collective authority of the teachers through the 'jiaoyanzu' provides a countervailing influence to the power of the principal" (p. 60). The teaching and researching group is advantageous for improving teaching quality and distributing leadership. The value of collectivism has been claimed as being lessened by the flexibility of working in universities, and by foreign culture. Meanwhile, the socialist market economy has also provided people with more options and possibilities, which promotes the spread of individualism.

As the second most prevalent cultural dimension in relation to the distribution of leadership in the four departments, socialist culture is mainly manifested by the establishment of the Party Committee. The leaders of the Party Committee at the university level is the Communist Party Secretary, who plays an important role in university development, while the leaders of the Party Committee at departmental level are called the Party Branch Secretaries, who are mainly in charge of Party building and have relatively minimal practical influence on academic development. The imbalance between three leadership powers- the power of decision-making, administrative power, and academic power - are pointed out within this study. It is acknowledged that within Chinese universities, the academic power should be increased whereas the administrative power should be lessened. This may be achieved through de-administration which is fully supported by all the respondents; its application is worth keeping an eye on.

6.2. Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the existing literature on distributed leadership by examining distributed leadership at the departmental level in a Chinese university. Distributed leadership has become one of the most popular and important leadership models in educational leadership and management in the West since

the mid-1990s (Tian et al, 2016). However, it can be noted that both theoretical and empirical study of distributed leadership in China is very rare. Likewise, most, although not all, of the existing literature on distributed leadership relates to schools rather than to Higher Education. This study helps to fill the research gap and bridge between domestic and foreign scholars to understand distributed leadership at the departmental level within Chinese Higher Education.

This study examines the factors which influence leadership distribution in the Chinese context through the perceptions of Chinese Heads and other members of the departments. The findings of this research points out the significance of a context-specific viewpoint while conducting social science research, through listing a number of cultural dimensions - including traditional Chinese culture and socialist culture - that are recognised as functioning in relation to distributed leadership. This is correspondent with the argument of Tian et al. (2016, p. 152) who wrote that, "findings of the studies cannot be regarded as universal truths but should be examined in various contexts to obtain broader verification". Last but not least, this study also shows that distributed leadership can coexist with hierarchy.

6.3. Limitation of the Study

With regard to generalisability, China is a vast country and there are a great many universities of different types in China. Meanwhile, many of the other universities in China are exposed to western influences to a greater or lesser degree than this university. All of this limits the generalisaibility of this study. The overall research approach adopted in this study was the use of multiple cases studies in four departments and the research findings of this study are therefore more generalisable in certain Chinese contexts, but less generalisable in some other contexts. Also, since the main focus of this study was the effects of the Chinese culture, this study would be less applicable in other cultures.

Meanwhile, interviews and questionnaire surveys were both designed in English and carried out in Mandarin; the results were translated into English afterwards.

The issue of translation may somehow influence the validity of the research due to the differences of expressions between languages. Personal information of the respondents (i.e. age, title, gender, education background, income, and etc.) were not included within the questionnaires; more variables can be taken into consideration when designing the questionnaires.

Another limitation is the possibility that some of the respondents may not tell the truth, even though the anonymity of the research had been assured. For example, in the course of interviews, there was an interviewee who suggested that the results may be more accurate if the conversations had not been recorded.

6.4. Implication for Future Research

Suggestions for future research can be understood from two perspectives. From the domestic perspective, firstly, China is a geographically big country with imbalanced regional development. This research was carried out in the birthplace of Confucian culture, showing the deep influence of traditional Chinese culture on distributed leadership; however, research findings may be different if the research was conducted within other universities or other districts of China. Therefore, it is worthwhile conducting research into distributed leadership within a variety of Chinese universities in different districts to gain a broader picture. Secondly, this study has revealed that with the rapid development of modern China, society is in a transitional period wherein the traditional Chinese culture is mixed with foreign values; the four case departments, made up of older and younger generations, present multiple values and answers regarding the same questions. The younger staff members are more likely to provide different views on issues regarding the cultural factors and leadership in the departments. If conditions allowed, it may be worthwhile conducting longitudinal research to catch the transformational process or to keep the literature updated about the shift and change of cultural factors and educational leadership in Chinese universities. This may help to break the stereotypes of educational leadership in Chinese universities and Chinese society.

Thirdly, from the global perspective, more variable studies should be done in this field. Besides the issue of district and age, there are also other variables that may have impact on the distributed leadership studies in different contexts. This study urges future researchers to conduct variable studies into distributed leadership. Aiming to provide guidance for the future studies, the researcher has summarised the variables that have been discovered within this study as follows:

- From the individual perspective, distributed leadership may be influenced by age, title, gender, education background, personality and income.
- From the organisational (departmental) perspective, it may be influenced by the subject of the department, departmental size, leaders' style and attributes, and the funding situation within the university.
- From the university perspective, it may be influenced by the university type, university quality, and the funding situation from the district.
- From the district perspective, it may be influenced by the unique district culture.
- From the national perspective, it may be influenced by the leadership system of the country, educational policy, the development of economy, domestic culture, and the development of science (i.e. information technology such as WeChat and online workshop).

Therefore, the recommendations for the further development of distributed leadership can be understood both theoretically and practically as follows:

Theoretically,

- As mentioned above, with the development of distributed leadership, scholars should pay attention to the context of distributed leadership. The socio-cultural context should be addressed through conducting variable studies. The listed variables that were discovered and summarised above by the researcher are recommended to the future researchers who carry on distributed leadership research.
- Scholars should carry on more distributed leadership research within the Higher Education context. Before conducting distributed leadership research, scholars need to make sure of the existence of distributed

leadership within the subject organisations. Therefore, it is recommended that design several questions are included regarding the level of the conceptual understanding of distributed leadership. This also helps to identify the organisational situation.

Practically,

- Policy makers should address the importance of leadership training through launching more leadership training schemes for all staff members instead of only for formal leaders. Meanwhile, when informal leaders take on leadership responsibilities, their benefits should be simultaneously protected through policies and regulations.
- Leaders should have the consciousness to cultivate the culture of distributed leadership and use strategies to encourage staff members to participate in leadership activities. For example, more leadership positions can be created for informal leaders to gain experience.
- Staff members especially female staff members should take the initiative to get involved in more leadership activities and decision-making processes.
- Within the Chinese Higher Education context, de-administration is expected to be promoted effectively and comprehensively.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Leaders and Teaching Fellows

Invitation letter

Dear respondent

Thank you for your participation. This is a study for my PhD research project about distributed leadership in China jointly funded by the University of Warwick and the Chinese Scholarship Council. In order to help you better understand the term- distributed leadership - please read the notes at the start of the questionnaire. The data collection includes a questionnaire survey and interviews. Following the questionnaire survey, you might be invited to participate in an interview.

Finally, thank you again for your cooperation.

Kind regards

Xintong Lu
PhD researcher in Education
University of Warwick
Email: Xintong.Lu@warwick.ac.uk

I have read the information above and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated.

Signed:_____

What is distributed leadership?

Distributed leadership is 'a leadership style which regards every person as an innate leader who can act as a leadership in organizations' (Goleman et al., 2002, p.14).

Questionnaire (leaders)

1. What is your (formal) position? (Please Tick one option)

   A. (Associate) Head of the Department

   B. (Associate) Party Branch Secretary

   C. Department /course leaders

2. Before reading the introduction above, to what extent were you aware of the term ***distributed leadership***? (Please tick one option)

   A. Not at all. B. To a small extent. C. To some extent. D. To a great extent.

3. To what extent do you agree that following statements are important in distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each options)

   A. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the department.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   B. Interactions between you and teachers rather than only workload delegation are important.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   C. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders. Teachers are also involved in leadership practice such as decision-making.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

4. To what extent do you think leadership is distributed in your department?

   A. Not at all. B. To a small extent. C. To some extent. D. To a great extent.

5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your department? (Please tick one value for each options)

   A. The formal structure of our department provides conditions for staff to be involved in leadership.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   B. In our department, we set common goals and expectations.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

C. We mutually respect and trust each other. We have positive beliefs such as viewing mistakes as a chance to learn.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

D. We work together, share resources and knowledge (teaching tools, academic books, etc.) to help each other.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

E. Staff are also involved in our decision-making process and we regard their ideas as important.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

F. Everyone feels responsible for our department and will take responsibility for us whether they are formal leaders or not.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

G. Staff are eager to take on leadership responsibilities.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

H. Staff feel able to request leadership responsibilities.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

6. How, if at all, are leadership responsibilities distributed in your department? (Please tick one option)
A. Through regulations and job descriptions.
B. We allocate workloads on an ad hoc basis depending on the situation.
C. Based on the department plan and goal.
D. We delegate responsibilities to the staff who show the capacity to lead.
E. Staff ask to be given leadership responsibilities.
F. There is already a culture and environment in our department of staff taking on leadership responsibilities.

G. Other (Please specify)_____

7. To what extent do you agree that following Chinese cultural elements influence distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each options)

A. Chinese staff prefer traditional leadership methods.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

B. We respect authority and prefer not to challenge the Chinese hierarchical top-down system.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

C. In China, the emphasis on collectivism leads us to share duties and mutually help each other in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

D. The ethical and moral aspects of Chinese culture help leadership distribution in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

E. Political factors such as the communist party secretary/ Party Branch Secretary have a significant influence on Chinese educational leadership.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

F. The socialist market economy enables staff to take initiatives and make decisions independently within the department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

G. The patriarchal tradition has an impact on leadership practice in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8. To what extent do you agree that this leadership model could offer the following benefits? (Please tick one value for each options)

A. It could contribute to organizational development of the department.

B. Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

C. It could improve the self-efficacy of staff.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

D. It could help improve students' performance.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*If there are others. Please specify_____.

9. To what extent do you agree with the following limitations of distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each option)

A. Formal leaders may feel threatened.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

B. It increases staffs' burdens and responsibilities but gives them no extra authority.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

C. Staff have no interest in taking on leadership responsibilities.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

D. Financial incentives are necessary to persuade staff to take on leadership responsibilities.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

E. Distributing leadership responsibilities may cause strained relationships.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

F. It is hard to achieve distributed leadership in the Chinese context because of our centralized government system.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*If there are others. Please specify_____.

10. How might leadership skills for all staff be developed? (Please tick as many as you wish.)

A. Leaders should create more formal leadership positions or reframe existing positions.

B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potential or ability.

C. Staff should be more involved in decision making

D. Formal leadership training should be provided

E. Others. Please specify_____.

11. Would you be willing to participate in an interview of approximately 30 minutes?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded and notes taken. The notes will be sent back to you later for checking and changing any of your responses should you wish. All the detailed information within this research will be confidential and kept in privacy. (Please tick one option.)

A. Yes.

B. No

12. Do you have any suggestions and advice to improve this questionnaire or my research?

Please

specify:_____.

Thank you!

Questionnaire (teaching fellows)

1. What is your (formal) position? (Please tick one Option)

   A. Professor

   B. Associate professor

   C. Teaching fellow

2. Before reading the introduction above, to what extent were you aware of the term ***distributed leadership***? (Please tick one option)

   A. Not at all. B. To a small extent. C. To some extent. D. To a great extent.

3. To what extent do you agree that following statements are important in distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each options)

   G. Leadership responsibilities are shared within the department.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   H. Interactions between you and leaders, rather than only workload delegation are important.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   I. Our formal leaders are not the only leaders. Teachers are also involved in leadership practice such as decision-making.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

   D. There is some participation of by informal leaders but not *everyone* leads.

   Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

4. To what extent do you think leadership is distributed in your department?

   A. Not at all. B. To a small extent. C. To some extent. D. To a great extent.

5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your department? (Please tick one value for each option)

   I. The formal structure of our department provides conditions for staff to be

involved in leadership.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

J. In our department, we set common goals and expectations.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

K. We mutually respect and trust each other. We have positive beliefs such as viewing mistakes as a chance to learn.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

L. We work together, share resources and knowledge (teaching tools, academic books, et al.) to help each other.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

M. Staff are involved in departmental decision-making and we regard their ideas important.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

N. Everyone feels responsible for our department and will take responsibilities for us regardless of whether or not they are formal leaders.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

O. Staff are eager to take on leadership responsibilities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

P. Staff feel able to request leadership responsibilities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

6. How are leadership responsibilities distributed in your department? (Please tick one option)

A. Through regulations and job descriptions.

B. We allocate workloads on an ad hoc basis depending on the situation.

C. Distributed based on the department plan and goal.

D. We delegate responsibilities to the staff who show the capacity to lead.

E. Staff take initiatives and ask for leadership responsibilities.

F. There is already a culture and environment in our department to take leadership responsibilities.

G. Others. Please specify_____.

7. In your opinion, to what extent do you agree that following Chinese cultural elements influence distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each options)

A. Chinese staff prefer traditional leadership methods.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

B. We respect authority and prefer not to challenge the Chinese hierarchical top-down system.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

C. In China, the emphasis of collectivism leads us to share duties and mutual**ly** help each other in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

J. The ethical and moral aspects of Chinese culture help leadership distribution in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

K. Political factors such the communist party secretary/ Party Branch Secretary have a significant influence on Chinese educational leadership.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

L. The socialist market economy enables staff to take initiatives and make decisions independently within the department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

G. The patriarchal tradition has an impact on leadership practice in our department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8. To what extent do you agree that this leadership model could offer the following benefits? (Please tick one value for each options)

E. It could contribute to the organizational development of the department.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

F. It could improve the self-efficacy of staff.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

G. It could help improve students' performance.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*If there are others. Please specify_____.

9. To what extent do you agree with the following limitations of distributed leadership? (Please tick one value for each options)

G. Formal leaders may feel threatened.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

H. It increases staffs' burdens and responsibilities but gives them no extra authority.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I. Staff have no interest in taking on leadership responsibilities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

J. Financial incentives are necessary to persuade staff to take on leadership responsibilities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

K. Distributing leadership responsibilities may cause strained relationships.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

L. It is hard to achieve distributed leadership in the Chinese context because of our centralized government system.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*If there are others. Please specify_____.

10. How can leadership skills for all staff be developed? (Please tick as many as you wish.)

A. Leaders should create more formal leadership positions or reframe existing positions.

B. Leaders should identify those with leadership potential or ability.

C. Staff should be involved in decision making

D. Formal leadership training should be provided

E. Others. Please specify_____.

11. Would you be willing to participate in an interview of approximately 30 minutes?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded and notes taken. The notes will be sent back to you later for checking and changing any of your responses should you wish. All the detailed information within this research will be confidential and kept in privacy. (Please tick one option.)

A. Yes.

B. No.

12. Do you have any suggestions and advice to improve this questionnaire or my research?

Please

specify:_____.Thank you!

Appendix 2: Interview Schedules for Department Formal Leaders, Teaching Staff, and University Leaders

Interview Schedules (for department formal leaders)

Protocol:

- Participants are asked to give their informed consent to the interview.
- They should be assured that confidentiality will be assured because neither their names, nor that of their department will not be used in the thesis
- They will be assured that they will have the opportunity to see, and to correct, the record of the interview.
- Only their approved version of the interview will be used in the thesis, and then only on an anonymous basis.

1. Responsibility Description

(a) What is your main formal position in this department?

(b) How would you describe your responsibilities?

2. Department Situation

(a) Do you encourage staff to take on leadership roles and responsibilities?

(b) How do you allocate leadership responsibilities?

(Prompts: regulations and job titles, temporary activities, department development plan, staff's ability…)

(c) What kind of staff will you select to take leadership responsibilities?

(d) How do you identify potential informal leaders?

(e)Are there any strategies that encourage staff to get involved into leadership activities?

(f) Do staff request leadership responsibilities?

(g) How would you describe the relationship between leaders and staff in your department? (Prompts: values and beliefs, cooperation, responsibilities)

3. Benefits and Barriers

(a) If there are staff who want to take on additional projects and roles, how does that benefit the department?

(b) What do you think are the benefits of having academic staff involved in leadership roles?

(Prompts: Can you think of any particular detailed examples?)

(c) What are your concerns about sharing leadership responsibilities?

(Prompts: leaders themselves and department)

(d) Do you think the participation of informal leaders will have an influence on department financial budget? (Prompts: need higher salary to motive and etc.)

4. Leadership Skills

(a) Do you think it is important to improve the leadership skills of staff?

(b) What leadership training or preparation is available for academic staff in your department?

5. Chinese Cultural Elements

(a) What elements of Chinese culture do you think will influence the distribution of leadership? (Prompts: hierarchy, worshipping the tradition, patriarchal, enterprise?)

(b) Do you think the establishment of jiaoyanzu (research and teaching group) is a representative of Chinese collectivism?

(c) Do you think it is difficult to change traditional Chinese educational leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model? If so, why?

(d) What is the role of the communist party secretary/ Party Branch Secretary in leadership in Chinese higher education?

Interview Schedules (for teaching staff)

Protocol:

- Participants are asked to give their informed consent to the interview.
- They should be assured that confidentiality will be assured because neither their names, nor that of their department will not be used in the thesis
- They will be assured that they will have the opportunity to see, and to correct, the record of the interview.
- Only their approved version of the interview will be used in the thesis, and then only on an anonymous basis.

1. Responsibility Description

(a) What is your main formal position in this department?

(b) How would you describe your responsibilities?

2. Department Situation

(a) Do you think staff have leadership responsibilities in your department?

(Prompt: some or all staff?)

(b) If so, how are these leadership responsibilities allocated?

(Prompts: regulations and job titles, temporary activities, department development plan, staff's ability…)

(c) Have you ever take leadership responsibilities in your department? Examples?

(d) Are you interested in taking on leadership roles? (Prompts: if no, why?)

(e) Are there any regular meetings, teaching groups etc. in your department that provide you with the opportunity to participate decision-making?

(f) How would you describe your leadership responsibilities?

3. How would you describe the relationship between leaders and staff in your department? (Prompts: values and beliefs, cooperation, responsibilities, common goals)

4. Benefits and Barriers

(a) What benefits can you bring to your department if you take on leadership responsibilities?

(b) How do you think taking leadership responsibilities benefits you? (Prompts: Higher salaries? Leadership skills? Promotion prospects?)

(c) Do you think this will also benefit students?

(Prompt: if no, why? If yes, how?)

(d) Do you think going into a formal leadership role would adversely affect your ability as a teacher?

(e) Are there any conflicts and barriers caused by you having leadership responsibilities?

(Prompts: if there are, can you think of any particular detailed examples?)

(f) Do you think taking leadership responsibilities may give you only responsibilities but no power?

5. Leadership Skills

(a) Have you ever been provided with any leadership training in your department?

(Prompt: if not, do you think it's necessary? What do you think of teacher training?)

(b) What might help you to improve your leadership skills?

6. Chinese Cultural Elements

(a) Do you think leadership in your department is autocratic?

(b) What do you think the influence of the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down system is on leadership within the department?

(c) Do you think it is difficult to change traditional Chinese educational leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model? If so, why?

(d) What elements of Chinese culture do you think will influence the distribution of leadership? (Prompts: hierarchy, worshipping the tradition, patriarchal, enterprise?)

Interview Schedules (for University leaders)

Protocol:

- Participants are asked to give their informed consent to the interview.
- They should be assured that confidentiality will be assured because neither their names, nor that of their university will not be used in the thesis
- They will be assured that they will have the opportunity to see, and to correct, the record of the interview.
- Only their approved version of the interview will be used in the thesis, and then only on an anonymous basis.

1. Responsibility Description

(a) What is your main formal position in this university?

(b) How would you describe your responsibilities?

2. University Situation

(a) Have you heard about the concept of distributed leadership?

(Prompt: what do you think it means?)

(b) Do you think that distributed leadership is, or could be, an appropriate leadership style for your university; at both university level and departmental level?

(Prompt: If so, why?)

(c) Do the departments have the freedom to choose their own leadership styles*?*

(Prompt: If so, what are the implications?

I.e. How would this affect *them* and *university*?)

(c) How are leadership responsibilities allocated within departments?

(Prompts: regulations and job titles, temporary activities, department development plan, staff's ability…)

(d) Are there any limitations on who can be given leadership responsibilities?

(e) How are potential informal leaders identified?

(f) Are there any strategies that encourage staff to get involved into leadership activities?

(g) Do you know if staff ever request leadership responsibilities?

3. Distributed leadership with Chinese Culture

(a) How do you think Distributed Leadership works/could work in the Chinese context?

(Prompt: Can it work in the Chinese context? Is it good or bad?)

(c) What elements of Chinese culture do you think will influence the distribution of leadership? (Prompts: hierarchy, worshipping the tradition, patriarchal, enterprise, collectivism and etc.?)

(d) Do you think it would be difficult to change traditional Chinese educational leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model? If so, why?

(e) What is the role of the communist party secretary/ Party Branch Secretary in relation to leadership and Distributed Leadership in Chinese higher education?

(Prompt: What influence might the Communist Party have on Distributed Leadership?)

4. Benefits and Barriers

(a) What do you think are the benefits of having academic staff involved in leadership roles?

(Prompts: Can you think of any particular detailed examples?)

(b) What are your concerns about sharing leadership responsibilities?

(Prompts: leaders themselves and university)

5. Leadership Skills

(a) Do you think it is important to improve the leadership skills of staff?

(b) What leadership training or preparation is available for academic staff in your University?

Appendix 3: Selected Transcripts

(Leader) - Leader 3 Department 2

A (interviewer): What is your formal position and responsibilities?

B(interviewee): As the Head of the Department, I oversee the general issues - the decisions regarding subject development, teachers' promotions, students' graduations, etc."

A: Do you encourage staff to take on leadership roles and responsibilities?

B: Yes.

A: How do you usually allocate leadership responsibilities?

B: Within our department, there are courses of maths and physics. We have department head and course leaders; the responsibilities will be allocated from them to the jiaoyanzu of each course.

A: Do you mean the work are allocated hierarchically?

B: yes.

A: Is there any special situations?

B: yes. For example, teaching assessment – we will call for some teachers directly to take on responsibilities. This happens occasionally but the daily routine is more linked with roles and regulations.

A: How frequent the special situations are?

B: It happens each year but it is not very frequent – no more than three times.

A: What kind of staff will you select to take on leadership responsibilities?

B: Firstly, it depends on initiatives. Secondly, he/she has ability and high moral standard which are approved by others.

A: Are there any strategies that encourage staff to get involve in leadership activities?

B: Of course. It happens mainly through our faculty meeting when leaders appraise the hard work of staff. The department will also provide financial reward if this extra work needs one or two months to be finished.

A: When you say praise, does that mean encouragement?

B: yes it is!

A: So do staff request responsibilities?

B: Some young staff asked if they could do some work for the faculty. I said it was a good idea. But this situation is relatively rare.

A: I found from the questionnaires that staff are more eager to take on responsibilities than feeling able to take on responsibilities?

B: Compared with other departments, we already have more staff getting involve in leadership responsibilities. The proportion has been around a third. It would be hard to let more people take on responsibilities.

A: How would you describe the relationship between leaders and staff in your department then?

B: We are harmonious and united. Of course, there are special situations like every department has – someone sent the anonymous letters to the head, making complains and giving suggestions.

A: So there is a channel for staff to do so?

B: Yes. We also welcome them to do it through a public way. Some people like to come and have a talk with the head about what they are not satisfied. We do listen. But more people do it anonymously…

A: Can they give their opinions and comments during the meeting?

B: Yes.

A: Is there cooperation within the department?

B: A lot.

A: What do you think are the benefits of having academic staff involved in leadership roles?

B: Firstly, it brings mutual understanding because staff will understand the hardship of being a leader. Secondly, staff can have a sense of fulfilment when they are approved by others; they can also learn many new things. But I do not encourage ‘everyone’ to be involved as some people have no intelligence to lead; For example, those people who have bad communication skill.

A: How about the organisational development? Do you think it also helps?

B: Of course.

A: Do you have any concerns about sharing leadership responsibilities?

B: Not really. The only thing is about keeping the balance.

A: Do you think the participation of informal leaders will have an influence on department financial budget?

B: A little bit. There is no extra financial allocation from the university for reward. We need to spend money from our annual bonus to reward the staff. To

be honest, it will influence the benefits of other teachers. But there is no need to give money each time- we can use vouchers or something else to reward instead of using money.

A: Do you think it is important to improve the leadership skills of staff?

B: It is important for teachers to teach students. The improvement of leadership skills helps not only the department but also helps the teacher to learn how to teach, communicate with students and manage the courses.

A: Is there any leadership training provided within the department?

B: No, the only chance is to attend the academic conferences. We have sent 16 teachers to go out and participate in those trainings.

A: What element of Chinese culture do you think will influence the distribution of leadership?

B: The doctrine of the mean. Then it is the harmony- harmony matters the most. I also think of the thought- "Xue er you ze shi (a good scholar will make an official)", a Chinese tradition. 'Xue' means academia; an individual who are good at learning are more likely to lead and appointed to be a leader.

A: How about collectivism? Do you think it still influences a lot?

B: It is still important. Staff are still told to think of us as a group. But some staff only focus on themselves and have no interest in collective activities.

A: Do you think jiaoyanzu is a representative of Chinese collectivism?

B: Our department has many public courses. We need research and teaching groups for such kind of courses – teachers prepare the lessons and exam papers and do the markings altogether. The benefit of it is to help young teachers to know better about the students and gain experiences; they can figure out how to teach the difficult chapters and the common mistakes students always make. This is an idea of collectivism. I think this way is better than teaching on your own.

A: Do you think it is difficult to change traditional Chinese educational leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model?

B: Teaching the lessons together is good for young teachers to quickly learn the teaching skills.

A: What do you think of adoring the tradition?

B: Its influence still exists. The greatest reform is the process of getting promotion. Everyone wants to be promoted even though your salary is not raised

- The pursuit of promotion is a symbol of value (the official standard thought). The examiners of promotion used to be the head of the department and university leaders. How can you not adore the 'authority'? They hold the power and your future. The government has launched the regulation that most of the administrative leaders will not be allowed to attend the promotion assessment anymore. Now most of the examiners are teachers. The political influence has been decreased; all the Party Secretary will not be allowed to attend whereas the proportion of university leaders for the assessment is not over a third. The position of authority has been lessened – this is a great progress.

A: Is the influence of Communist Party big?

B: There are two levels. The party leader at the University level is called the Communist Party Secretary; the second level is called Party Branch Secretary within the department. The influence of party leader at the university level is still big- they are the leader of university heads; they appoint the university leaders. However, it is different at the departmental level- they are to help and support the Heads of the Department and are led by the heads. The duty of the Party Branch Secretary is just to supervise.

A: What do you think of the de-administration?

B: It is good. Based upon my understanding, the leaders at the departmental level will not be seen as the administrative leaders anymore. This means the assessment of us will not be in an administrative way- our passports have been handed out, going abroad is restricted and controlled. De-administration means I will not be a 'leader' but an ordinary professor. I will have freedom- I can make my own company, I can do part time, I can do everything. I am not allowed to do this when I am an administrative leader right now. De-demonstration is definitely a good thing for the department heads.

A: Will your financial allocation be influenced by de-administration?

B: No.

A: So you think it is not difficult to change the traditional leadership to a more shared kind, is it?

B: No, it is not. It is just a process. China is a big boat. The reform needs to be steady and slow. People will accept it. The radical change is too extreme and easy to cause turbulence.

Selected Transcription (Staff) - Staff 2 Department 1

A (Interviewer): What is your position in this department?

B(Interviewee): Researching and teaching. I teach the undergraduates and supervise the postgraduates.

A: Do you think staff have leadership responsibilities in your department?

B: Yes.

A: Do only certain staff have the chances or everyone has...?

B: Everyone has the chance.

A: How are the leadership responsibilities allocated?

B: The first level is the (Associate) Head of the Departments, followed by the second level- course leader. Then it is the Director of the Experimental Centre. The work will then be allocated to the staff.

A: So is it from top-down?

B: Yes, it is vertical.

A: Are there any special situations?

B: Yes, sometimes leaders will directly find a teacher to do the work. The relationship within the department is not simply leaders and staff. I think it is partnership- sometimes teachers may bring some cooperative research projects which can be understood as a bottom-up power; the department provides resource and information to the teachers which can be seen as a top-down power.

A: How are the responsibilities allocated when there are special situations?

B: According to the subjects and job titles.

A: So could I see it as a mainly top-down approach?

B: For teaching, it is. But researching is not. Teachers apply the research projects on their own. It is autonomic and is not related to the department.

A: Have you ever take on leadership responsibilities in your department?

B: I used to take some responsibilities on managing research projects.

A: Are you interested in taking on leadership roles?

B: yes.

A: Are there any regular meetings etc. in your department that provide you with the opportunity to participate in decision-making?

B: We have regular meetings and there are chances to give advices. I have no

idea if the advices will be taken though.

A: How would you describe the relationship between leaders and staff in your department?

B: We have a harmonious working environment. The definition of leaders and staff is blurry, because universities need to be flexible and autonomic.

A: Can you explain the reason?

B: University needs a flexible and autonomous working environment. Our goal is to cultivate people and do research.

A: What benefit can you bring to your department if you take on leadership responsibilities?

B: It helps to improve my ability; my knowledge can be used. It is also beneficial for the organisational development; I can bring research projects and cooperation. It is a win-win process.

A: Do you think it will bring you higher salaries?

B: I think so. I can make more money from the society by doing so. The department will give me some reward but it will not be too much.

A: Do you think it will benefit students?

B: Of course. The students will be benefited from participating in the research project once the teacher gets the project. They can learn a lot from the practical experiments. Our teaching ability can also be improved.

A: Do you think going into a formal leadership role would adversely affect your ability as a teacher?

B: It certainly needs some energy and time to do so. It will influence a bit. But it should not be a big problem if I make a good plan.

A: Are there barriers caused by you having leadership responsibilities?

B: No.

A: How about the financial cost of the department? Do you think it will be influenced by staff taking on responsibilities?

B: No, I do not think so. This kind of participation does not mean that they need to give us money. We volunteer to do so and would like to help our department.

A: This thought seems to be unique within Asian context, why do you like to work when there is no money?

B: Our university system is different; we have limited findings. We do hope we

could get some money for doing so but we all know that our department does not have a lot of money. So I do not mind making contribution to our department.

A: Do you mean that you will just see those extra work as your responsibilities?

B: Yes, exactly.

A: Is think a kind of collectivism?

B: Yes, it is true!

A: Do you think taking leadership responsibilities may give your only responsibilities but no power?

B: This is a problem. It is not balanced- it is a spirit of dedication you know.

A: Does it influence your ambition?

B: Yes, it will 'influence' a bit. But it is not a barrier.

A: I found from the questionnaires that teachers would like to take on leadership responsibilities, but fewer of them think they are able to do so?

B: The current Chinese system is democratic centralism. Some teachers will not actually take any action to take on responsibilities when we truly need someone to do things.

A: Have you ever been provided with any leadership training in your department?

B: No.

A: Do you think it is necessary?

B: This is something we need to do! There are trainings at the university level but there is not at the departmental level, especially for staff members. This is a defect.

A: What might help staff to improve leadership skills?

B: I think it is necessary to provide some visiting opportunities. We have some academic trainings within the department but there is no any for improving leadership ability.

A: Do you think leadership in your department is autocratic?

B: No, it is very autonomous.

A: What do you think the influence of the traditional Chinese hierarchical top-down system is on leadership within the department?

B: The influence of the traditional culture on teaching is very obvious- our teaching tasks are allocated top-down. Teachers' opinions are asked first though.

Research work is autonomous.

A: Do you think it is difficult to change traditional Chinese educational leadership from a hierarchical to a shared model?

B: I think it is possible to achieve within Chinese universities. The nature of university reflects that teachers need autonomy. In this way, instead of being powerful and forceful, the expectation on leaders is to coordinate and communicate with staff members. This helps to bring innovation.

A: What is the extent of adoring authority within your department?

B: It is not like the old times anymore. Nowadays people are not afraid to doubt and challenge the authority. The current conclusions made from the authority may not be correct after few years later. I told the students to dare to challenge the authority. Science makes progress by breaking the old rules.

A: So how about the political influence?

B: There is a political influence but it is not too much. The government do not interfere the universities that much.

A: How about the influence of the Party Secretary?

B: It is a political influence. The role of them is to manage affairs of the party members rather than managing the academic staff within the department.

A: What elements of Chinese culture do you think will influence the distribution of leadership?

B: The traditional Culture – it is deeply rooted in our brains. Collectivism – it has been educated for ages. Then, the certain Chinese personality- Chinese people pay attention to the responsibilities and collective benefits.

Appendix 4: Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees

Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees
(MA by research, MPHIL/PhD, EdD)

Name of student	MA By research	EdD	**PhD**

Xintong Lu

Project title

A study of the Extent to which Leadership is distributed at Departmental Level in a Chinese University

Supervisor

Dr Robert Smith, Mr Ian Abbott

Funding Body (if relevant)

Warwick University and Chinese Scholarship Council jointly

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook.

Methodology

Please outline the methodology e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc.

Questionnaire Surveys and Interviews.

Participants

Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. children; as a result of learning disability.

Participants of pilot study include formal leaders and teaching fellows in the department of Environmental Engineering in Q University.

Participants of formal research include formal leaders and teaching fellows in the Department of chemistry, chemical engineering, foreign language and economic management, in Q University.

Respect for participants' rights and dignity

How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?

The prior informed consent will be obtained by an invitation letter, which provides details information and confidential promise of this research. Participants will be asked to sign the letter. The respondents have right to withdraw from the research at any time. The participants with different cultures will be respected with equality. There are not any religious related questions involved in this study.

Privacy and confidentiality

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

None of the personal information except respondents' position will be asked. There will not be any personal detailed information mentioned in the study. Pseudonyms will be used. Meanwhile, all the data records such as personal information and interview transcripts will be deleted/destroyed after the submission of the thesis.

Consent - will prior informed consent be obtained?

- from participants? **Yes**/No from others? Yes/**No**

- explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

Before the study, respondents will receive the invitation letter.

- will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?

Yes, the detailed information of the researcher will be given in the invitation letters. It includes the name of the researcher, department, University name and contact information.

Competence

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

Before the formal study, a pilot study will be utilized to check the questionnaire surveys and interview schedules. Results will be analysed for further editing the research instruments. The formal study will be undertaken after passing the upgrade and under the supervision of University of Warwick supervisors.

Protection of participants

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

The respondents have right to withdraw during anytime of the research. The interviews will be processed in the public places regardless of whether they are online interviews or face-by-face. The detailed information of the researcher is given prior of the study. Meanwhile, the researcher will guarantee that the transcripts, note taken and detailed information will be kept by researcher only and there won't be any other persons that can access the data.

Child protection

Will a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service formerly CRB) check be needed?

Yes/**No** (If yes, please attach a copy.)

Addressing dilemmas

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

To know the ethical obligations can help avoid ethical dilemmas. If it does happen, respondents have right to withdraw the research and the information that they provided will not be used. Research interaction will be terminated.

If the complaint happens, the researcher will try to fully understand the concerns and take it seriously. Apologies and explain will be given if there is any misunderstanding.

Misuse of research

How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

The research aims and questions will be properly explained and answered. The literature reviews will be ensured updated to date. The accuracy of the study will be checked by pilot studies and respondents' data return. All the quotes will be referenced. The interpretations and conclusions will be justified according to the evidences of data findings. Evidence resulting from the research will be anonymized in terms of individual respondents and will only be used for purposes of the thesis and subsequent academic writings approved by the University.

Support for research participants

What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?

The researcher will explain and apologize if there is any misunderstanding. If it becomes serious and worse, the researcher will remind that they can withdraw if there want, or terminate the research interaction directly.

Integrity

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?

Research will be carried out under the ethical approval of the University. Data arising from the respondents will be kept confidential. All the quotations from the literature will be referenced. Any conclusions drawn will be based entirely on the evidence of the findings.

What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?

Supervisors have agreed that the student will have sole authorship of any publications arising from the research.

Other issues?

Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

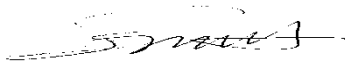
None.

Signed

Research student Date

12/03/16

Supervisor Dr Bob Smith Date 13/3/16



Action

Please submit to the Research Office (Louisa Hopkins, room WE132)

Action taken

☐ Approved

☐ Approved with modification or conditions – see below

☐ Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Name Date

Signature

Stamped

Notes of Action